

My BraveNewWorld Essays: II

by

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December 22, 2011 – June 18, 2012

[Note: After sending some of these essays to the www.bravenewworld.in web site, I made a few modifications. Thus, some of the essays here do not match perfectly their equivalents on that web site.

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[[December 22, 2011: <http://bravenewworld.in/some-reactionary-comments/>]

Some “Reactionary” Comments

Alton C. Thompson

But don’t get me wrong—I am not an optimist. I am a staunch, hardcore, dyed-in-the-wool possibilist. I believe it is possible that we can turn today’s breakdown into a planetary breakthrough—on one condition: We can do it if we can break free of a set of dominant but misleading ideas that are taking us down. Ideas? Yes.

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The central problem this book addresses is that, sadly, much of humanity today is stuck in precisely this “hard fact”—trapped in a mental map that defeats us because it is mal-aligned both with human nature and with the wider laws of nature. So, the question is, Can we remake our mental map? And do it much faster than those early astronomers? Can we remake our mental map?

So says Frances Moore Lappé, in an excerpt from (<http://www.truth-out.org/ecomind-changing-way-we-think-create-world-we-want/1324491542>) her *EcoMind: Changing the Way We Think, to Create the World We Want* (New York: Nation Books, 2011).

I haven’t read this book—and likely will not be—so that I don’t know what suggestions Lappé makes regarding remaking our mental maps. Nonetheless, following I make my own comments on this subject—and begin by noting that although there is commonality in the mental maps of those who live in our society, it is also true that each of us has a unique mental map; and that intermediate between these two facts of commonality and uniqueness is the fact that if, for a sample of Americans, the various dimensions of “mental map” were determined in quantitative terms, and those quantitative values were then “crunched” in a mathematical grouping program, different categories would emerge. That is, an empirical study of “mental maps” would reach the conclusion that different *types* of mental maps existed in the society.

Furthermore, if those *types* were examined, it likely would be determined that they varied in (e.g.,) how *ecologically responsible* they were. Granted that the *dominant* mental map in our society is one that would fall into the category “ecologically *irresponsible*.” But just as Thorstein Veblen [1857 – 1929] implicitly recognized that not everyone in our society had a “pecuniary” mental map (some having an “industrial” one), so should we recognize today that not everyone in our society has an “ecologically *irresponsible*” mental map: Some already *have* the appropriate “ideas” to which Lappé presumably makes reference.

The above facts have significance for two reasons:

- Efforts to “convert” those with an “ecologically irresponsible.” mental are likely to be fruitless, thus a waste of time and effort. However, this fact should not lead one to a sense of despair, because
- There *are* members of our society who *already* have an “ecologically responsible” mental map, and if they (a) come to recognize this about themselves, (b) recognize, therefore, that they have a responsibility to act on the basis of that mental map, and (c) then do so, the possibility exists that our society can be moved in an ecologically responsible direction.

A caution, however: A high degree of optimism is unwarranted: If one accepts the conclusions of James Lovelock and others to the effect that (a) it is too late to halt global warming and, (b) therefore, our only choice is to engage in adaptive activities, but (c) even those who engage in such activities have a low probability of having descendants, it follows that the world’s population in 2100 CE is likely to be but a fraction of what it is today (7 billion). These conclusions may turn out to be excessively pessimistic, but it’s better to err on that side than the side of excessive optimism.

What the above conclusions suggest is that those who now have an appropriate mental map—the appropriate “ideas”—focus on determining an appropriate course of action for themselves, and begin acting on those plans ASAP. In doing so, I believe that they should recognize that it would be foolish to try to convince governments to assume a leadership position, and also foolish to try to convert others to their way of thinking.

What they need to recognize, rather, is that their task is to start creating a new way of life within the Existing Order—but doing so not in a “survivalist” mode but, rather, a “brother’s keeper” one. That is, once they have been successful in initiating a new way of life—one that is as independent as possible from the Existing Order—they should do what they can in attracting others to join them. Not just in the United States, of course, but throughout the world—without, however, with the intention of imposing a “one size fits all” model on the rest of the world.

It would turn out that a use of a “brother’s keeper” approach would not only be *ethical*, but be one with a *self-interested* element. For as the ravages of global warming result in ever-more chaotic conditions, those who are inmates of the Existing Order will become desperate, and pose a threat to those who have been making an egress from the Existing Order. Therefore, the more people who can be drawn into the movement for a new way of life, the safer will be those in that movement.

A final point: In the Existing Order the primary values are drive, ambition, assertiveness, aggressiveness, competition, achievement, success, an emphasis of intellect/rationality over emotion, etc. Such values are dominant because they reflect the needs of the Existing Order as a *societal system*, but that system itself is leading us to the edge of the abyss. Thus, the creators of a new way of life must recognize that they must create institutions that conduce the emergence of a value system very different from the one now having dominance, and that make difficult a re-emergence of the value system now current. Surely we humans have the intelligence to do so!

Jan. 27, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/free-pdf-salvation-for-the-21st-century/>

Salvation for the Twenty-First Century

Alton C. Thompson

In his [column](#) of today (January 23, 2012) for the www.truthdig.com web site, [Chris Hedges](#) noted that he had spent “Friday morning sitting on a wooden bench in a fourth-floor courtroom in the New York Criminal Court in Manhattan. I was waiting to be sentenced for ‘disturbing the peace’ and ‘refusing to obey a lawful order’ during an Occupy demonstration in front of Goldman Sachs in November.” He then noted, wryly:

“Those sentenced before me constituted the usual fare of the court. They were poor people of color accused of mostly petty crimes—drug possession, thefts, shoplifting, trespassing because they were homeless and needed a place to sleep, inappropriate touching, grand larceny and violation of probation.”

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“The country’s most egregious criminals, the ones who had stripped some of those being sentenced of their homes, their right to a decent education and health care, their jobs, their dignity and their hope, those wallowing in tens and hundreds of millions of dollars, those who had gamed the system to enrich themselves at our expense, were doing the dirty business of speculation in the tall office towers a few blocks away. They were making money. A few of these wealthy plutocrats were with the president, who was in New York that day to attend four fundraisers that took in an estimated \$3 million.”

What Hedges (and others) had been protesting, back in November, was the fact that American society has become a society within which “democracy” is now a hollow word, as corporations and rich individuals have become the dominant force in our society—a problem exacerbated by the Supreme Court’s [Citizens United](#) v. *Federal Election Commission* decision of slightly over two years ago (January 21, 2010). In effect, Hedges’s protesting efforts stemmed from his belief that our society needed to be “saved” . . . from such dominance—“saved” being a term that would be familiar to Hedges, being the son of a Presbyterian minister, and having himself received a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard University. Hedges, however, eschewed the use of this evocative term.

Hedges went on to note:

“Voting will not alter the corporate systems of power. is an act of political theater. Voting in the United States is as futile and sterile as in the elections I covered as a reporter in dictatorships like Syria, Iran and Iraq.”

His answer:

“Our efforts must be directed toward acts of civil disobedience, to chipping away, through nonviolent protest, at the pillars of established, corporate power. The corporate state is so unfair, so corrupt and so rotten that the institutions tasked with holding it up—the police, the press, the banking system, the civil service and the judiciary—have become vulnerable.”

As much as I agree with Hedges that our society is currently rotten to the core, I part company with him when it comes to addressing the problem of corporate/rich dominance. His solution—“acts of civil disobedience”—is based on the assumption that the major components of our society have become vulnerable. He added:

“I do not know how long it will take to dethrone the corporate state, but I do know it is a dead and terminal system of power. As the global economy deteriorates and climate change causes greater disruptions, these corporations will be increasingly discredited. I know the iron grip of corporations over our lives will, eventually, be broken. The corporate state will, like all wounded animals, lash out with a blind fury, which is why I suspect we have been given the National Defense Authorization Act, which permits the military to arrest and hold U.S. citizens without due process. It will increase pressure to become crueler and more callous at the base of the columns it depends on for survival. And eventually it will break. No one knows how long this will take. It could be months, years, maybe even a decade, although the massive assault by the fossil fuel industry on the ecosystem will probably force a popular response sooner than we expect. The only question is how much damage these corporations will be permitted to inflict.”

Hedges’s position seems to be that given the vulnerability of the Existing Order, protest efforts will eventually result in the System’s collapse, there being somewhere along the way a “popular response” that will “set things right.” My problem with this “view of the world” is twofold:

- I’m not convinced that Hedges takes “global warming” seriously enough.
- Whereas I agree with Hedges that the response must be a “popular” one (rather than one led by government), Hedges evidently sees this response as being of a *retroactive* nature, but I am convinced that it must be *proactive*.

Given that I write as one who, like Hedges, has a background in Christianity (of which, though, I am [highly critical](#)!—to the extent that I believe that we need salvation from it!), I find it “natural” to use the language of “salvation” in this essay, and to draw upon the Bible in making my presentation. Let me begin, then, by commenting on a common concept of “salvation” in Christianity—a concept that is highly discordant with my way of thinking.

“[Salvation](#)”—a concept associated especially with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—has a variety of meanings, most of which are such that “salvation” is tacitly followed by *from*.¹ This raises (at least) three questions:

- *What* is being “saved”?
- *From* what?
- *How* does salvation occur?

These questions are answered in a variety of ways, among them the following:

- One’s “soul” is the object of salvation.
- It is saved from an afterlife in Hell or its equivalent.
- Salvation is accomplished by the individual involved accepting a certain set of beliefs (about, e.g., Jesus and God).

The fact that other answers can be provided to the above three questions is not of interest for the purposes of my essay, for the two points that I wish to address here are that:

- The above concept of salvation—although seemingly rather common—is not particularly Biblical.
- (More to the point:) Neither is it particularly relevant for the twenty-first century.

This second statement suggests the question—“What concept of salvation *is*, then, relevant for the twenty-first century?”—and it is that question that is my basic reason for writing this essay, in that I will provide an answer to that question. *My* answer, that is.

First, though, I wish to comment on the basically non-Biblical nature of the above-stated concept of salvation. In doing so, it is useful to begin by noting that this concept:

¹ *For*, though, is usually associated with *Spirit-filling*.. For example, Paul of Tarsus famously stated in [Galatians 5](#) (verses 22, 23) that: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

- Has an orientation to a supposed *afterlife* at the expense of earthly existence—whether in the here-and-now, or in the future.
- Is *individualistic* in that the behavior enjoined by the concept is directed at one's *own* soul, without any reference to the souls of others²
- The “behavior” enjoined is primarily, if not exclusively, of a *mental* nature—that of giving assent to a certain set of beliefs.

These characteristics of the particular concept of salvation identified above make it one with little Biblical support. In referring here to “Biblical support” I am referring primarily to the “Old Testament,” given that for Jesus it was the books in *that* collection that constituted Scripture.

First, the Old Testament's orientation is primarily to *this* world, rather than a supposed afterlife. For example, there is this passage in [Deuteronomy](#) 20 (verses 3, 4):

“And he [the priest] shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the LORD your God *is* He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’”

This passage from [Psalms](#) 37 (verse 40):

“The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.”

And this one, also from [Psalms](#) (137:7):

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me.”

Second, the Old Testament is by no means individualistic in orientation. An excellent example is this beautiful passage in Job (29:12 – 17):

“When the poor cried out, I helped them.
I gave help to orphans who had nowhere to turn.
Men who were in deepest misery praised me, and
I helped widows find security.
I have always acted justly and fairly.

² As I will note later, some who accept this concept of salvation may believe that they should help others in need—but not so much because doing so is *desirable*, or a worthy *end*, but because doing so is a *means* to their *own* salvation.

I was eyes for the blind,
and feet for the lame.
I was like a father to the poor
and took the side of strangers in trouble.
I destroyed the power of cruel men
and rescued their victims.”

A very similar passage occurs in [Matthew](#) 25 (verses 35, 36):

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”³

However, the Matthew passage ends this way (verses 45, 46):

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Thus, with the Matthew passage feeding the hungry, etc., is a “ticket” to “eternal life,” whereas with the Job passage helping the poor, etc., is simply doing what is “right,” doing what God wants one to do, without any sort of *reward* attached to one’s good deeds.

Not only does the Old Testament have a this-worldly orientation that is combined with a focus on being aware of others’ needs, and then doing what one can to address those needs; it also has a *societal* orientation—a point well illustrated by the injunction to “tithe.” In [Deuteronomy](#) 14 (verses 22 – 29) we find the following:

“Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice.

³ Note that this passage bears some resemblance to the Galatians passage quoted in footnote 1. However, whereas the Galatians passage refers to *personal traits*, the Matthean passage can be thought of as referring to *what one should do* with such traits.

“And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own. At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year’s produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”

Note here that:

- The tithing rule applied only to *landowners*.
- More specifically, it applied only to those landowners whose land was being used to *produce food items*.
- The tithe required was to be “paid” with *food* items, not money.
- For the first two years of three the tithe from a given property was to be taken to the place where “at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name” and there eaten—evidently by, and only by, those who live on and/or work that property. Note that although the 10% rule applied to “grain, wine, and olive oil,” it did *not* apply to animals. In the case of animals the tithe involved only the “first born.”
- If one believed that the place of worship was too far to carry one’s food items, one could choose to sell them, and bring the money from that sale to the place of worship. In this case one would then buy food at that location, and then consume it (as a family)—in a party atmosphere, evidently!
- The third year would involve different activities. In this case one would take one’s tithe (but only of crops—note that in this case there is no reference to “first-born” cattle or sheep), *not* to the place of worship, but, rather, to a near town. Evidently the towns had storage facilities, and one was required to bring one’s tithe to one of these, and deposit it there. These then functioned as “food pantries” for those in need—specifically, [Levites](#), foreigners, orphans, and widows [and others in need—such as the poor?].

What’s interesting about this tithing rule is that it not only has a *societal* orientation (i.e., it evinces a concern for the well-being of *all* members of the society), but also has an orientation to *prevention*. That is, whereas the Matthew 25 passage quoted above tacitly assumes that there are human problems “out there,” and “commands” one to not only become aware of them, but address them, this passage on the tithe *anticipates* such problems and provides a solution whose intent is to *prevent* them from arising! Nothing comparable to this occurs in the New Testament—perhaps because Jesus and his early followers were living in an occupied (by the Romans) society, a situation that virtually forced Jesus to adopt more of an individualistic orientation than he may have wanted to adopt.

Third, not only does the Old Testament have more of a societal orientation than an individualistic one; its orientation is clearly to proper *behavior* (i.e., orthopraxy) rather than proper *belief* (orthodoxy). But as the orientation of the New Testament is *also* to orthopraxy, the concept of salvation identified above is not only not “in tune” with the Old Testament, but also the New one!—the main difference between the orthopraxy of the Old and New Testaments being that the latter has an orientation to a supposed afterlife that the former does not.

If the concept of salvation identified and discussed above is not particularly *Biblical*, neither is it particularly *relevant* for the twenty-first century. Which assertion suggests the question: If *that* concept of salvation lacks relevance for the twenty-first century, what concept of salvation, then, *does* have relevance for the century within which we live?

In answering that question, I would assert that the answer should have two features:

- It should have a *Biblical* basis, while simultaneously
- Having *relevance* for the situation that we currently face, as people living in the early part of the twenty-first century.

Given the association of “from” with “salvation,” the first question that arises here is: From *what* do we need to be “saved” at present? And, of course, different individuals would answer this question in different ways.

Some would say that the [world will end](#) before the year is out, so that talk of salvation is simply pointless. Some would deny that the world is about to end, but would assert that our society is in the [process of collapsing](#), and nothing can be done to halt this process—so that, again, talk of salvation is pointless.

Still others would point to the “[doomsday clock](#),” referring to the devastation that would result from a thermo-nuclear war;⁴ they would say that doomsday is not inevitable but that we are living in a dangerous time, and must exert extreme care to avoid disaster: we *can* be “saved,” but there is no guarantee that we *will* be—actions by our leaders will determine whether we are or not. Others would say (during this period of caucuses and primaries in the United States), that our society is in bad shape, but that the election of a new president will result in “turning things around.” Such people see the possibility of salvation—and see it in the election of a new president. Etc.

The answer that *I* would provide to this “from” question differs from any of the above in that it refers to a body of research and thought that is not only not “mainstream,” but rejected outright

⁴ On January 10, 2012, the time was set to 11:55 pm. The time on this clock (with 12:00 midnight representing “doomsday”) is set by the board of directors of the [Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#).

by many “deniers.” My answer is based on the premise that (to quote Bob Dylan) “The Times They Are a Changin,’”⁵ In referring to that song title I am not, however, claiming that

There’s a battle outside
And it is ragin’

Nor that

Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command

The only part of Dylan’s lyrics that has any relevance for my answer is

soon
You’ll be drenched to the bone

for that from which we *especially* need “salvation” today—in my opinion, at any rate—is “[global warming](#).”

I have put “global warming” in quotation marks because the term is misleading. The *term* suggests—and *only* suggests—that Earth’s temperature is gradually increasing, but the fact of the matter is that a *series* of atmospheric phenomena are associated with the term, including:

- A *trend* in increase in the global mean temperature.
- That trend is not a linear one but, rather, a *curvilinear* one—such that the *rate* of change (in trend terms) is itself likely to increase over time.
- Storms are likely to be increasing in their *frequency* (in the same manner).
- Storms are likely to be increasing in their *intensity* (in the same manner).
- Variability in atmospheric conditions at a given location is likely to increase over time (again, in the same manner).

The latter possibility means that “climate change” is also an unfortunate term for what is occurring, because increased variability implies that the very *concept* of “[climate](#)” is becoming ever more passé.

⁵ Dylan wrote the words for this September/October of 1963—shortly before President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963.

The basic reason why we should be concerned about “global warming” (I wish there were a more apt term!⁶) is that it is likely to result in a loss of human life⁷ such as to make the “[Black Death](#)” of the mid fourteenth century seem trivial in comparison. Noted British scientist James Lovelock (of “Gaia” fame) has stated, for example, that:

Before long, we may face planet-wide devastation worse even than unrestricted nuclear war between superpowers. The climate war could kill nearly all of us and leave the few survivors living a Stone Age existence.

Lovelock has stated that the world’s population—which currently stands at slightly over 7 billion—could be reduced to around 500 million (i.e., about 7% of its current size!)—by the end of this century.⁸ Which makes global warming one of the premiere moral issues of the day.

Note that Lovelock’s prediction implies that it is now *too late* to halt global warming. Which, in turn, implies that those who striving to be “[green](#)” by recycling, switching to electric-powered vehicles, etc., in the belief that their efforts are making a “contribution” in the fight against global warming are fooling themselves. For what Lovelock’s prediction implies is that:

- Our only rational course of action today is that of striving to *adapt*, as best we can, to the changes that will be associated with, and precipitated by, global warming.
- Although one will increase the odds for survival (for oneself and one’s descendants) by making a conscious effort to adapt, even this will not guarantee that one (or one’s descendants) will survive to 2100 CE—and it’s certainly possible that some of the survivors will be individuals who have *not* engaged in any planning for survival.

Now given the above, it should be obvious that only a fool would look to government—regardless of level—for “salvation”: certainly the recent mouthings of those who are now candidates for president (of the United States) give one no basis for having confidence in governmental officials providing leadership here. Given this, the suggestion is that if one is to engage in adaptive activities, one will need to do so either as

⁶ Hereafter I will not put “global warming” in quotation marks.

⁷ Many species have already become extinct because of global warming. See [this](#) and [this](#) for example.

⁸ See, e.g., <http://sites.google.com/site/climategenocide/lovelock-james>. Lovelock’s most recent books are [The Revenge of Gaia](#) and [The Vanishing Face of Gaia](#). Given Lovelock’s advanced age, the latter book is likely the last one that he will write.

(a) an individual (or family member), or as (b) a member of a group specially created, by its members, to plan, and then engage in, adaptive activities.

To do this one should have some “feel” for:

- Some of the “events” that would likely occur while the world’s population is being severely culled by global warming.
- The sorts of activities that would be involved with “adaptive efforts.”

Having some answers to those “questions,” one would be in the best position for deciding how one should proceed; thus, it is necessary that I provide some of my thoughts on these two points.

In addressing the “question” of some of the “events” associated with global warming, my first point is that those living in tropical areas likely would be most impacted by the ravages of global warming. On the other hand, however (and “all things being equal”), those associated with more “advanced” societies would likely be more vulnerable than those in less “advanced” societies—for two reasons:

- The average citizen of an “advanced” society tends to be much less self-sufficient than one of a society that is at a “lower stage of development”: S/he is dependent on food produced at varying distances from the place of reference; on fuel produced/refined at some distant location; on housing produced from raw materials, using tools, produced far from the place of residence; etc.
- Large agglomerations of people are more common in “highly developed” societies than in “lesser-developed” ones—and are inherently more vulnerable than scattered populations.

As global warming continues, and intensifies over time, “events” such as the following should become increasingly common:

- With more—and increasingly severe—storms there will be not only an increased amount of property damage, but increased loss of life (from hurricane winds, flooding, monstrous snowfalls, etc.).
- The melting of ice and snow will cause sea level to rise, and a point will be reached necessitating the movement of many people from coastal locations farther inland. This process of movement is unlikely to be a smooth one.

- Because of weather variability, drought will become more of a problem, meaning not only that fires will become more frequent (with property damage and loss of life), but so will crop/domestic animal loss. The latter will mean increased cost of food, even its unavailability—leading to disease and starvation.
- The production/distribution system will begin to break down, making some items increasingly difficult to obtain; insofar as such items are necessities, this will contribute to disease and starvation.
- Fuels will be among the items that become difficult, if not impossible, to obtain—making the heating/cooling of homes difficult, if not impossible, and affecting both the production and transportation of goods. In other words (regarding the latter point), the economy will increasingly grind to a halt. Not only will this result in disease and starvation, but people leaving their homes in search of food and other necessities—using violence, if necessary, to obtain what they need. Thus, some will die prematurely as a result of violent behavior on the part of others.
- Not only will the production/distribution system “unravel;” governments—which hadn’t planned for this in the first place!—will begin to break down, “fall apart,” thereby becoming *incapable* of helping their citizens.
- In short, societies will begin to disintegrate into chaotic states. In an “advanced” society the rich may have the best chance to “weather” the initial stages of the disaster that is occurring. But because such people are parasites, this initial advantage will not last—and the advantage will go especially to those who have planned, and engaged in, adaptive measures. (Along with those who—like the Amish, to a degree—have inadvertently (!) engaged in adaptive efforts.)

Which raises the important question: “What does one need to do to be saved?” Or, expressed another way: “What does one need to do to adapt to the changes that global warming will inevitably be bringing?”

In answering this question, I would begin by alluding to an earlier point—that one can act as an individual or as a member of a group—and suggest that although some among us

might find the first path most to their liking, I suspect that most of us would prefer the second path. In either case, however, I would cite the following four principles:⁹

- If one lives in an oceanic coastal area, move inland—for rising sea levels will eventually force you to move anyway.
- If one does not live in the mid or upper latitudes, move to such a location—choosing a specific location that has potable water, is at least somewhat forested, has arable soil, provides good sites (e.g., enabling the construction of earth-sheltered dwellings), etc.
- In moving, move as far as possible from large cities—for protection against roaming marauders from such areas.
- Try to be as self-sufficient as possible. As the society begins to disintegrate, an ability to produce for one’s own needs will become increasingly essential for survival. There will be an opportunity to “ease into” this, given that societal collapse likely will not occur for a few decades yet; on the other hand, however, it is a principle that should be taken seriously—self-sufficiency with food and fuel in particular. Fortunately, as more and more individuals establish “[intentional communities](#),” with an adaptational intent, the possibility will increasingly arise for communities beginning to specialize and engage in inter-community trade.

Those who follow these principles should not lose sight of the fact that they are not “[survivalists](#)” *per se*—i.e., individuals who are *only* interested in their survival. I am addressing these words to “Bible people”—and specifically people who take seriously the “commands” of Matthew 25 (verses 35, 36), for example. People who, in creating communities, would (a) work to ensure that those within their community had all of their needs met, and (b) strive to convince those still in the Larger Society of the danger of remaining there, and to help them adapt as well (by, e.g., following *their* example).

In using the term “Bible people” it should be clear—to those who have read my [e-book](#) and [essays](#) on this site—that I am referring to the *behavioral principles* that are in the Bible; and specifically—it goes without saying—the sorts of principles that I have quoted from the Bible. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that in “saving” ourselves from global warming (as well as we can), we use that opportunity to save ourselves from the various religions (!) that have plagued humankind for millennia. Religions have created barriers

⁹ As I stated before, following such principles will not *guarantee* one’s survival, but will increase the odds that one will survive.

between people, which barriers have led to much of the evil that the world has known over the past 10,000 years.

This is not to say that religion *per se* should be abandoned. It is to say, rather, that the religions that have existed so far have made the mistake of focusing on the wrong thing—on *orthodoxy* rather than *orthopraxy*. What’s needed is a universal religion, one that has the simple principle “love thy neighbor” as its central principle (see my [essay](#)). Granted that “operationalizing” that principle raises problems of its own—but not such that should lead to physical conflict.

The above discussion likely raises more questions than it provides answers, but my intent here was to be *suggestive* rather than *definitive*. And in being suggestive, I have directed (so far as “global warming” is concerned) my comments to those who (already) believe that it is occurring: I have no interest in trying to *convince* others of this. Those who believe that this is a serious problem will act on that belief; those who do not act will not—and will need to suffer the consequences.

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[February 1, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/another-perspective-on-samantha-garvey/>]

Another Perspective on Samantha Garvey

Alton C. Thompson

If you watched President Barack Obama's recent State-of-the-Union speech, you know that one of the highlights was his "personalizing" of our society's problems. For example, he referred to Samantha Garvey, the young girl who had been homeless, but had still be able to perform at a high level in school, and was a finalist for a prestigious award.

In an [interview](#) with Ellen Degeneres, she stated: "If you keep your head up, and keep moving on, things will get better." Little did this 18-year-old realize that she was expressing a "truth" that delights members of the elite.

For although Jesus, e.g., had stated that providing help to the poor was one of the actions that the good person engages in, the elite of our society—of most societies!—prefers a "blame the victim" philosophy. True, they may distinguish between the "deserving" poor and the riffraff, and be willing to help the former—especially if they can gain some good publicity for so doing—but their basic position is that our society is a meritocratic one, meaning that what one gets is what one deserves.

If you are rich, this is because you play by the rules, are intelligent, are hard-working, etc.; and if you are poor, this is because you lack intelligence, lack good work habits, don't know how to spend your money wisely, etc.

Because a "blame the victim" philosophy prevails in this society—despite the claim that this is a "Christian" country—one finds oneself intellectually justified in doing little, if anything, for the less fortunate, and will give only to the "deserving," and only if doing so contributes to one's own standing in the society. Indeed, members of the elite would eschew use of the term "less fortunate" because that implies that success and non-success are merely a matter of luck.

Candidate Mitt Romney—characterized (accurately) as a "vulture capitalist" by some of his opponents—has made clear his conviction that he has "earned" all of the money that he has acquired, and that he therefore *deserves* it all. Given that he *deserves* it all, it is his right and responsibility to spend it in any way that he chooses; and he has chosen to give but a fraction to "charity" (for one cannot count his giving to the Mormon church as charitable giving).

When one hears Samantha Garvey speak, unless one is abnormal, one will develop a feeling of admiration for her, one will be touched by her story. This I do not deny. But what is not so apparent is that she has been *used*, without her knowledge—used to lend support to the pernicious "blame the victim" philosophy that dominates our society.

[February 7, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/is-capitalism-inherently-evil/>]

Is Capitalism Inherently Evil?

Alton C. Thompson

“[Capitalism](#)” is usually used to refer to the economic system present in a country, having features such as the following:

- Most property is owned privately—either by individuals, or by groups of same (i.e., “shareholders”).
- The “property” being referred to includes *land*, and whatever *resources* are associated with a given land parcel (from those on the earth’s surface, down to those below the surface—down to the earth’s core), and including the parcel’s (relative) *location*; and that which has been built on that parcel—such as buildings housing production, storage, wholesale, and/or retail activities, buildings housing people (i.e., “residents”), etc.
- Any given individual in the society is at liberty to initiate a business.
- Those who choose not to do so, given that they need an income to satisfy their various needs (“basic” and otherwise), must sell their labor to an individual or firm.
- The nature of consumer demand will determine what “industries” arise in the society—so that consumer demand will be satisfied.
- The economy will be competitive—so that only those firms will survive that are able to obtain an income sufficient to “cover” the costs incurred, and the wages paid to those who are employees will equal the actual monetary value of their “labor” (whether physical or mental). Thus, all actors in the economy—whether entrepreneurs or employees—receive what they deserve.
- Government does not “interfere” with the activities of actors in the economy.
- All components of the economy “play by the rules”—meaning that thievery does not occur. A major function of government is to ensure that all actors in the economy *do* play by the rules.

Ideally, with a given industry, within a given “market,” there will be so many sellers that no one seller will be able to dictate prices to be paid by consumers or suppliers. In reality, however, it is

recognized that although the ideal is *perfect* competition, the actuality is often some form of [imperfect competition](#)—such as oligopoly, duopoly, or even monopoly.

The definition of “capitalism” offered above refers, of course, to the economy in a *hypothetical* society, and two questions therefore arise:

- How does this “theory” get *manifested* in our society—i.e., how has it “worked out” *actually* in our society?
- Did it *inevitably* get “worked out” in this manner?

The basis for this second question is the possibility that the *way* our economy developed over time was a result of factors *in addition to* the “capitalistic philosophy.” So that although that “philosophy” played a role in shaping our economy, so did certain other factors. And the significance of *that* possibility is that the evils of our society may be more a result of those “other” factors than of our acceptance of capitalistic “theory” *per se*.

These observations lead us to ask:

- What are the *primary* evils of our society?
- Are those evils attributable to the *capitalistic* nature of our economy (i.e., those aspects of our economy that seemingly draw upon capitalistic “theory”)?
- If, rather, they are attributable primarily to *other* factors, can the evils of our society be eradicated by “fixing” those other factors, while retaining the “capitalistic” nature of our economy?

As to societal evils: Rather than providing a list of this society’s many evils here, I choose to identify what I regard as the *fundamental* evil—the *basis* for all other evils: greed—which has two “faces”:

- A “drive” to *acquire* as much money as one can.
- A tendency to be *selfish*—to use the money that one acquires to purchase things for oneself (including family members), and to “buy” politicians (facilitated by recent court decisions). The basis of this selfishness is in part a conviction that the acquisition of material things is what brings happiness, and in part is simply an irrational “drive.”

What makes greed an evil is not so much greed *per se*; rather, it is its combination with the fact that despite what capitalistic “theory” tacitly assumes, people *vary* in their characteristics. They vary in their physical characteristics, their interests, their intelligence, their skills, their

knowledge—and their motivations. Some are more motivated by greed than others; and when such people also have intelligence, knowledge, and a lack of scruples, they are virtually guaranteed to move up the “success ladder” in our society. Individuals such as presidential candidate Mitt Romney like to think that their success is a function of desert (i.e., that they *deserve* to be successful). And although despicable individuals such as Romney may sincerely *believe* this to be the case, the truth is rather different!

In identifying greed as our society’s fundamental evil, it should be noted that the prominence of this evil in our society is in serious conflict with the claim that this is a “Christian” society. For if this society warranted the latter label, the primary principle guiding behavior in the society—regardless of one’s abilities, education, etc.—would be that one is one’s brother’s keeper, one should love the neighbor as oneself. However, Christianity as it exists in the United States bears little resemblance to the precepts promulgated by the prophets of Hebrew Scripture (the “Old Testament” for Christians), or the Jesus of the gospels. Throughout history Christianity has tended to *reflect* the society that houses it, rather than *influence* it, and in consequence most versions of Christianity are simply fraudulent.

Granted that greed (on the part of some) is this society’s fundamental problem, is it reasonable to blame this on our acceptance of capitalistic “theory” (ideology would be a better term), however? Over the years I have answered this question in the affirmative, but have never been able to do so with much conviction, because I have long sensed that there is a better answer. I have not, however, been able to articulate that answer until recently.

All of us, I would guess, have ideas floating around in our minds, and we fail to see the connections that might exist between some of those ideas until some stimulus that we encounter causes us to make some important connections. I had read Jean Liedloff’s [*The Continuum Concept: In Search of Happiness Lost*](#), 1972) many years ago, and had been so impressed with the book that I had discussed it in Chapter 3 of my eBook [*What Are Churches For?*](#) I had not, however, connected the societal problem of greed to the contents of Liedloff’s book until I started reading Phyllis K. Davis’s *The Power of Touch*, 1991). (The [revised](#)—1999—edition of this book add the subtitle: *The Basis for Survival, Health, Intimacy, and Emotional Well-Being*.) It’s not that Davis connected the subject of touch with greed in her book; it’s just that my reading of that book—perhaps combined with my disgust over current presidential politics—somehow caused me to connect the two.

As one who was raised in Christianity and has done a considerable amount of reading in the scholarly literature concerning Christianity and religion in general, I have long wondered why such a “disconnect” exists between behavior as enjoined by, e.g., Jesus, and behavior as one observes it in our society—especially on the part of the rich and powerful in our society. My reading of the Davis book on the one hand helped me recall Liedloff’s much earlier book (not

referenced by Davis!), and on the other hand somehow caused me to formulate the following hypothesis:

The fact that we are a “touchless” society—which goes to the extreme of having touchless car washes!—is especially evident in how many children are raised in this society. That is, many infants and children do not have their needs for being held met, and, as a consequence, do not develop as they should (the Yequana studied by Liedloff providing a model here). They do not develop properly in physical/physiological terms (e.g., their immune systems), in intellectual terms, in emotional terms, etc. Because of this, many develop illnesses that are attributable to this upbringing, some develop emotional problems, some engage in perverted behaviors—and some develop an impulse to acquire, i.e., become greedy.

This de-emphasis on touch in our society may reflect the influence of the [Puritanism](#) of our ancestors, the fact that *refraining* from touching has actually been *taught* (!) by certain “experts” (e.g., L. Emmett Holt in his old [The Care and Feeding of Children](#), 1894), etc. But regardless of the factors that *explain* it, an *observation* seems reasonable, which observation suggests a *question*.

The observation:

To be a follower of the “love of neighbor” principle, one must not only accept that principle intellectually, but possess empathy. One will be most able to develop empathy for others if one’s need for touch was satisfied while very young, and continues to be satisfied. (Note that this need has two dimensions—a need to be touched, and a need to touch; and that the former need must be satisfied in a manner agreeable/acceptable to the person being touched.)

The question:

Given that our societal problem is not so much inappropriate touching but an inadequate amount of (proper) touching, can this problem be “fixed”?

If it *can* be, I believe that there is hope for our society—that the evil of greed can be eradicated.

Fortunately, I *do* believe that this problem can be “fixed,” However, I would insist that efforts to “fix” this problem be made in the context of the broader situation facing us humans at present—the threat of warming, e.g., that I refer to in my recent [“Salvation for the Twenty-First Century.”](#) As I note in that essay, it appears that our only hope at present is to adapt to the changes that “global warming” will inevitably bring, and that those adaptational efforts must be engaged in by individuals—acting either as individuals, or as members of groups.

The wisest course, it seems to me, is for individuals to either initiate “intentional” communities for themselves or to move to existing ones—taking care to do so with adaptation to global

warming in mind. Another consideration, however, is a consideration of human “design specifications” (see Chapters 3 and 4 of my “[What Are Churches For?](#)”), with perhaps an emphasis on the need for touch.

In effect, I am suggesting the need for creating a New Society within the shell of the existing one; and although my reference is in particular to the United States, much of what I have said applies to other societies as well (but people in other societies must work out their own solutions). In developing that New Society, it may turn out that capitalistic “theory” can play a role—something that I can hardly believe that I am saying, given my commitment over the years to more communalistic ideas! However, I try to be flexible in my thinking, and when I come to believe that there are good reasons to change my mind, I am not afraid to make an “about face”!

This is not to say that I believe that capitalistic thinking *should* guide our thinking as we strive to adapt; rather, it is to say that such thinking should not be simply rejected out of hand. Our guiding principle should be: Having widespread human well-being (and human survival!) as our ultimate goal, use those ideas and procedures that have promise for achieving that goal.

Trickle-Down Theory

Alton C. Thompson

The first question that must be asked of “trickle-down theory” is: Is the word “theory” being appropriately used in this case? Which question, in turn, raises the question: What *is* a theory?

A “theory” is an explanatory device. More specifically, a theory is a set of statements (i.e., *explanans*) from which a true statement (i.e., *explanandum*) can be deduced. The interpretation given to this fact that the true statement is “produced” by the *explanans* is that the *explanans* “explains” the *explanandum*.

It should be kept in mind that just because *one* set of statements (i.e., one *explanans*) “explains” a given *explanandum*, it doesn’t follow that that *explanandum* cannot also be “explained” by a *different* set of statements. For this reason, one can never be certain that a given *explanans* is the “true” one for a given *explanandum*. And when more than one *explanans* exists for a given *explanandum*, a question that arises is: Should only one of them be accepted or, rather, is there good reason to accept more than one?

Getting back to the original question: Does “trickle-down” theory warrant the label “theory”?

There *is* an argument associated with “trickle-down theory,” and it seems to be as follows: If tax rates for those with the highest incomes are “low,” given that these individuals are the “job creators” in our society, these individuals will have the resources that enable them to create jobs, and they will so do (in this country, rather than abroad).

This argument makes several factual claims:

- It is the wealthy individuals in our society who are the job creators.
- If these individuals have a low tax rate, they will use their “disposable” income not only to live a lavish lifestyle (which spending creates jobs *indirectly*), but will *directly* create jobs.
- Not only will the wealthy create jobs; the jobs that are created in the society during a given period of time will all be created by the wealthy.
- Thereby, some of the wealth of the very wealthy will “trickle down” to those “below” them. That is, the *spending* engaged in by the wealthy creates jobs *indirectly*, and in addition, some of the wealthy engage *directly* in job creation. Thus, *all* of the wealthy make *some* contribution to job creation, and *all* of the jobs that are created in a society

during a given time period .are attributable in one way or another to the society's wealthy individuals.

These factual claims are *tacitly* associated with the “theory,” not *explicitly* so associated, it's true; nevertheless, they *are* necessarily associated with the “theory.” Given this, it appears reasonable to state that the fourth of these statements is the *explanandum* of the “theory,” and that the first three statements constitute the “theory” *per se*.

For this “theory” to qualify as a theory in the true sense, the first requirement that must meet is that its *explanandum* must be a true statement. And the first obstacle that we encounter in attempting to determine its “truthfulness” is that the statement is not very precise—i.e., is somewhat ambiguous. In addition, however, the *explanandum* associated with a theory is usually thought of as a true unrestricted generalization—i.e., a *law*. Thus, those who promulgate trickle-down “theory” have as, their initial obligation, to:

- State their *explanandum* in an unambiguous manner, so that it *can* be tested by researchers.
- Demonstrate that it has firm empirical support, and is of a “law-like” nature.

Only then is it appropriate to think about creating a theory—i.e., an explanatory structure. What advocates of the trickle-down “theory” have done, rather, is to concoct an argument that has a certain degree of plausibility, but is utterly lacking in empirical support for the *explanandum* involved. *That* fact means that use of the term “theory” in conjunction with this set of ideas is highly inappropriate.

What should be done with the *explanandum* here is to state it as a *hypothesis*, and then engage in the necessary empirical research to *test* that hypothesis. But this won't happen, of course. Those who propound the “theory” don't want to be embarrassed by stating their *explanandum* in an unambiguous manner, and as a hypothesis—and then proceed to test that hypothesis. They want to use the term “theory” because that term lends an air of prestige to their ideas; their interest is in convincing people, not in making statements with scientific merit. Their hope is that people will *accept* their “ideas” so that they will “go along” with the proposals put forth by those proposing the “theory.” By using the term “theory” in conjunction with their ideas, their hope is that the populace will not “catch on” to the fact that the “theory” is actually designed to serve the economic interests of those who promulgate it (or at least serve the economic interests of the *masters* of such people). Put another way, use of the term “theory” in this context is *obfuscating*, for it is designed to discourage critical thought regarding the “theory.”

The power over people's minds of this "theory" must be reduced, ideally to the point of zero. To do this, we must first "unmask" it—which is what I have attempted to do here—and then publicize the facts that serve that purpose.

In addition, it wouldn't hurt to poke fun at the "theory." For example, several years ago a local (Milwaukee) journalist referred to it as the "*tinkle*-down theory," suggesting—well, I don't think I have to interpret this for you! There may be other good ideas along this line.

The Callenbach-Wasserman Conversation

Alton C. Thompson

About three years ago Ernest Callenbach (author of [*Ecotopia*](#), 1975) and Harvey Wasserman (author of [*Solartopia: Our Green-Powered Earth*](#), 2007) got together to discuss their related ideas, which conversation was [video taped](#). (The transcript of the conversation can be read [here](#).) As both of these gentlemen are forward-looking, and have made an important contribution, e.g., through their novels, I hesitate to be critical of what they said in this conversation. However, some of their comments warrant criticism, and I use this essay to offer my own comments on some of their statements in that conversation.

In commenting on what Callenbach and Wasserman say, I confine my attention to this conversation between them rather than the contents of their books—in part because, although I have read *Ecotopia*, that was long ago, and I haven't read *Solartopia* (and likely never will).

- Early on Callenbach states that: “We ultimately are going to be living in a solar world. That’s all the incoming energy we’ve got”—and then adds: “Geothermal is the exception to that.” This statement indicates the principal “thrust” of their discussion, for their focus is especially on technology, the development of alternate sources of energy in particular. For example, they refer to deriving energy from fodder beets, Jerusalem artichokes, cat-tails, [kudzu](#), algae, hemp—and the wind. I have no problem with their interest in alternate sources of energy, but think that their thinking about the future is too dominated by this topic, to the exclusion of other important topics.
- Callenbach also, early on, states: “*Ecotopia* is at bottom biological and anthropological.” “I’m always trying to look at social structures, how do institutions evolve, how do things change socially.” However, the discussion between these two gentlemen involves little attention to such topics. Wasserman states: “You can’t have corporations structured the way they are [and] still have an Ecotopian-Solartopian reality.” Callenbach states that “nation states may be dinosaurs that we have not yet recognized as dinosaurs,” and adds that “we are going to have to invent some new kind of economic system.” But his earlier reference to “jobs” indicates that he thinks of the future economic system as but a modification of the present one. More basically, the discussion between Callenbach and Wasserman involves little discussion of institutional change. Wasserman states, near the end of their conversation: “The desirability now of ranchettes, small ten-acre parcels with a small garden where retirees and young people can go and really make it with a windmill and solar panels. That’s really the future.” This strikes me as evidencing a lack of imagination—from a sociological standpoint—on the part of both of these gentlemen.
- Despite Callenbach’s avowed interest in the biological and anthropological, their discussion evinces no interest in humans as biological entities. For example, they devote no time to the discussion of human needs, “design specification” (see Chapters 3 and 4 in

my [What Are Churches For?](#)). Nor does their discussion evince any awareness of the “discrepancy” concept (see Chapter 2 in the just-cited eBook).

- Callenbach and Wasserman place an excessive faith in President Barack Obama (given a Nobel Peace Prize for what reasons??). They hope that Obama will “get us turned around from the military solution always being the thing we go for toward political and for that matter social and ecological solutions being the things they go for.” Callenbach says: “I don’t think it was a dumb thing for Barack Obama to talk about hope so much”—as if there is a correlation between Obama’s talk and his actions! And then there’s Callenbach’s outrageous statement: “Here he [i.e., Obama] is . . . cleaning up the white guy’s [i.e., President George Bush’s] mess”—when it would be more accurate to say that Obama has been basically continuing Bush’s policies, and in some respects is even worse than Bush. (And here I didn’t think that was even possible!)
- Their reference to CONG—i.e., coal, oil, nukes, and gas—reflects their orientation to the concept of *sustainability*. The question that arises regarding such an orientation, however, is: Is that concept currently *relevant*? My position is that if this principle had been adopted by all countries in 1750, our current problem of global warming would never have developed. But that principle was *not* adopted, and global warming *is* a problem. In fact, I agree with British scientist James Lovelock that we either have reached the “tipping point,” or soon will. That is, Earth System (“Gaia” to Lovelock) has been so stressed by human activities that the negative feedback mechanisms that have been “working” to maintain relative stability have been (or are about to be) replaced with positive feedback mechanisms—those “working” to propel us toward disaster. In fact, Lovelock predicts that global warming will result in most of the world’s population being culled by 2100 CE (but *directly* by starvation, disease, and violence). Now if certain processes have been set in motion that we humans cannot reverse (with the possibility that attempts at technological “fixes” will simply *intensify* the problem), it should be obvious that the concept of sustainability is now obsolete. Our catchword today should, rather, be *adaptation*—in that we had better start thinking in terms of how to adapt to the changes that will inevitably be occurring, because that’s the only choice we now have.
- They seem to place their hope for effectuating change in *government*, being seemingly unaware that our society is “democratic” in name only. In actuality, it is controlled by rich individuals and the officers of major corporations—and those individuals have an obsessive interest in the short-run at the expense of the future. (See Bill McKibben’s two excellent recent essays at [this site](#).) This means that those who engage in adaptive efforts will need to do so as *individuals* or as members of *private groups*—for only a fool would look to government for leadership on this matter.
- Callenbach states early on: “What we need to do is to make our cities more compact and efficient and to make them produce both energy as you [Wasserman] have in *Solartopia* and for that matter food.” However, an important question here is: *Can* cities survive the ravages of global warming? If the world’s population is reduced, by 2100 CE, to about 7% of its current level (per Lovelock), how will such a world be able to support cities? And what’s so good about cities anyway?! The economic interdependence that enables

cities to exist also enables *exploitation* to occur—and it *does*. This is not to say, of course, that the *absence* of a high degree of interdependence guarantees the absence of exploitation; but such absence is more conducive to the absence of exploitation than is the existence of a high degree of interdependence. Callenbach states that “Ecotopia, like your [i.e., Wasserman’s] Solartopia, is very decentralized . . .,” but his reference to cities implies that a high degree of decentralization does *not*, in fact, exist in Ecotopia.

- Callenbach states at one point: “When the banks started to come unglued and the investment companies and so on, I was thinking of a passage in *Ecotopia* where the narrator, Weston, meets an Ecotopian militant who says, ‘Well, we kind of welcomed economic collapse and the flight of capital because we knew that could be turned to advantage,’ a T’ai Chi move, or something like that.” “So out of chaos and catastrophe can come . . . it loosens up the rock pile that American politics tends to be. All the rocks are settled in so tight against each other that nothing can move.”

If Callenbach and Wasserman actually believe that the collapse of our society will be a “good thing,” because it will enable a flowering of Ecotopia, I think they are being foolish. What seems to be a more reasonable stance—to me—is to assume that our society *will* be collapsing, and those who anticipate this would be wise to begin NOW to start engaging in adaptive activities. For doing so might not only help reduce the loss of life that will be involved with societal collapse, but contribute to the success of adaptational efforts.

- Callenbach states: “This is not a beautiful system to operate in, though it may be better than alternatives. I don’t know. But at any rate, it’s what we have, what we’re stuck with. Maybe we can use the engine of corrupt Congress, and greedy industrialists, to build *Solartopia* or *Ecotopia*.”

The first part of this statement suggests that United States society, because of its relative lack of repression, is an ideal place to begin building a New Society within the shell of the Existing Order—and I agree with that point. However, his reference to “Congress” and “greedy industrialists” suggests that that’s not what he has in mind after all—so that it’s not clear what his thinking is on this matter!

- Wasserman’s reference to “population control” tells me that neither he nor Callenbach takes global warming seriously. Don’t they agree with James Lovelock that global warming will make this “issue” a non-issue?—in that global warming will severely cull the world’s population by the end of this century. That is, global warming will act as an agent of “population control.”
- Some of the statements made in this conversation go beyond the bounds of being naïve. For example, Wasserman states at one point “we have to abolish war”—as if this can be accomplished easily! And then later declares “Poverty is unsustainable”—suggesting not only that that’s the only reason he’s against it (making him anything but an Old

Testament prophet!), but that *because* it's "unsustainable" it "must" at some point in time disappear! What a dreamer!

If I had to state my problem with the contents of this conversation briefly, it would be that the intellectual orientation of both Callenbach and Wasserman is deeply colored by their commitment to the concept of *sustainability*. Unfortunately, that concept has long been obsolete, with the concept of *adaptation* now being the relevant one. However, that fact has yet to sink into the psyches of many in this society, or other societies, which fact will prove to be a disaster for our species. I hate to be a prophet on this matter, but have no other choice.

[February 21, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/what-planet-is-chris-hedges-from/>]

What Planet is Chris Hedges From?

Alton C. Thompson

Chris Hedges, in his recent "[Occupy Draws Strength From the Powerless](#)," states:

Those who do not carve out spaces separate from the state and its systems of power, those who cannot find room to become autonomous, or who do not "live in truth," inevitably become compromised. In [Vaclav] Havel's words, they "are the system." The Occupy movement, by naming corporate power and refusing to compromise with it, by forming alternative systems of community and society, embodies Havel's call to "live in truth." It does not appeal to the systems of control, and for this reason it is a genuine threat to the corporate state.

Who is Hedges kidding? And what's so important about the Occupy Movement anyway? Are they addressing the primary issue facing us Americans—us humans—at present, or is their focus on a *minor* issue?

The Occupy Movement, as I perceive it, has been reacting to the fact that more and more of us not only increasingly *feel* powerless, but *are*—for as Jim Hightower put it today, "[It's Official: Money Now Governs America](#)." But in *protesting* this fact, what is the Occupy Movement accomplishing? Hedges seems to argue that this Movement is "a genuine threat to the corporate state." But is it really? And is that the primary thing that needs to be done anyway?

My answer is a definite "No!" in both cases. But in defending my position I plan to ignore the first question in favor of the second one—for the simple reason that I regard it as the most important one. And I would answer that question by asserting that two major—and related—problems face humankind at present, problems that make all other problems—such as corporate power—pale in comparison:

- The fact of global warming.
- The fact that a whole industry exists out there denying the fact of global warming (see [this](#), for example).

In some of my previous essays (e.g., "[Salvation for the 21st Century](#)") I have discussed the threat posed by global warming. Suffice it to say that I am "with" British scientist James Lovelock (of "Gaia" fame) in believing that the events precipitated by global warming in the decades ahead will result in a severe culling of the world's population—from the current 7 billion to perhaps as little as 500 million (or perhaps even less) by 2100 CE. Thus, this is a *moral* issue, and I find it

surprising that [Hedges](#)—who has had theological training—is seemingly oblivious to the moral challenge presented by this threat.

Lovelock would argue that we humans have either reached a stage of “runaway,” or will very soon reach that stage—a stage where the negative feedback mechanisms that have been “working” to maintain relative stability give way to positive feedback mechanisms having the effect of propelling us toward disaster. What this means is that we may have entered a phase of change such that reversing that change is now impossible: No *proven* technology exists which could be deployed that might halt the change that is occurring.

If it is true that we are now in a stage of no return, the implication is that there is now but *one* course of action open to us—that of attempting to *adapt*, as best we can, to the changes that will be occurring, are occurring *already*, in fact. And even if we have not yet reached that stage, the “inertia” of our socio-economic systems is such that we are *guaranteed* to reach it soon. So that the sooner we begin to think about *how* to adapt, and then *acting* on our ideas, the better the chance that fewer will die as a consequence of global warming. And—just as important—the better the chance that those living in 2100 CE will have some semblance of a “civilized” life.

Unfortunately, there are many “deniers” in our midst, and as the link provided at the beginning indicates, many of them are very wealthy, and are using that wealth to promote denial in the general population. It’s likely that such efforts are meeting with success—which fact should make us nervous. For it implies that efforts at adaptation will be scattered and feeble—so that Lovelock’s prediction that few humans will be alive in 2100 CE will turn out to be realistic. Being 72 myself, I am unlikely to experience the full effects of global warming. But I have four grandchildren, and they most certainly will. Let me assure you, it is hard to be cheerful when you know that your flesh-and-blood may die prematurely because (indirectly) of global warming, and you feel powerless to do anything about it. If *I* had the wealth of some of these deniers, I know what I would do with it. Unfortunately, that is far from the case—and the pain that I feel is not only the sciatica in my left leg, but the pain in my heart. (:

[February 29, 2012, but written in 2009: <http://bravenewworld.in/pdf-explaining-an-anomaly/> *This was originally written in 2009.*]

Explaining An Anomaly

Alton C. Thompson

Over the past decade a field of research that has emerged in Psychology is what might be called Happiness Research—discovering what makes people happy. Given that the research undertaken has lacked the depth and sophistication of comparable anthropological research,¹⁰ one must not put too much stock in the results of that research. Still, the research of such individuals as Edward Diener, Robert Emmons, Daniel Kahneman, David Lykken, Christopher Peterson, and Martin Seligman have provided valuable information on the sources of happiness, and have identified such sources as the following:

- Having several good friends with whom one interacts frequently and harmoniously—which can include having a pet.
- Maintaining good relationships with members of one’s family (and spouse’s family—if married or living with a “significant other”).
- Having a loving partner—including a homosexual one.
- Having a job that matches one’s interests and abilities.
- Developing “outside” interests that one can commit oneself to during one’s “free” time.
- Giving money to help support causes that help further your values.
- Being involved in a religion.
- Being actively involved in activities that help others—especially ones that involve direct contact with such people.
- Developing certain attitudes—such as attempting to eschew feelings of envy, and learning to be forgiving and grateful for what one has (and not just materially). (If one

¹⁰ For example, Colin M. Turnbull, *The Human Cycle*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983; David Maybury-Lewis, *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*. New York: Viking, 1992. Also of relevance here is a book such as George Edgin Pugh, *The Biological Origin of Human Values*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977. A very readable book on the subject from a brain researcher and preventive medicine specialist is Robert Ornstein and David Sobel, *Healthy Pleasures*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1989.

allows oneself to be constantly envious, angry, etc., one is in effect allowing others to rule one's life—thereby simply adding to one's unhappiness, and perhaps even setting oneself up for psychosomatic disorders.)

The above are not the only sources of happiness—and, of course, the sources of happiness for one person are not necessarily the same as those for another person. Also, happiness should not be equated with well-being: an individual may have a deadly disease (thereby lacking well-being) but nonetheless be happy—which fact suggests that one's *subjective* views—in this case regarding one's happiness—should not be considered apart from *objective* factors affecting one's well-being.

My intention here, however, is not to discuss happiness *per se* relative to well-being. Rather, it is to note that the empirical research that has been done relative to happiness has provided little support to the view that *material consumption* is the primary source of happiness. If one takes a course in Microeconomics while in college, one likely will learn that the models that Economists have created to explain the economic behavior of individuals acting as household representatives (i.e., behavior involving purchasing or selling) assume that satisfaction is gained from the consumption of material goods and services; that, indeed, the demand for such consumption is virtually insatiable. Economists do not claim that such consumption is the *sole* source of satisfaction—which would be inconsistent with their acknowledgement that households *do* exist. Because their focus is on consumption, however, they likely leave many students with impression that consumption *is* the key to happiness—so that after graduating, rational behavior on their part would involve getting the highest-paying job possible. They may also learn—although not being explicitly taught this—that they are permitted to use any means possible to achieve the highest income possible, including ones on the other side of legality.

Not only do some college students learn—or at least infer—from certain of their courses that their goal in life should be to maximize their earning power, and therefore enroll in those courses that will most contribute to that end. The prevailing “philosophy” in our society—even for those who have not attended college—is that income maximization should be their primary goal, and that they should take those (legal or quasi-legal) steps that will contribute to that end. Income maximization is, of course, not just an end; it is also a means to making those purchases of goods and services that (supposedly) will bring one happiness—a large house, expensive cars, expensive parties, expensive trips, etc. That is, spending on oneself, one's family members, and one's “friends.” But in many cases income maximization is pursued also (or instead) as an end—as if one were in a contest to “beat” others simply in terms of seeing how much money one can acquire, ideally getting on the list of the richest individuals in the world.

Such a pursuit on the part of some has various *consequences*—including for the society. My focus here is, however, not on that fact. Rather, it is to note that the happiness research that has been conducted over the past decade provides us with no basis for explaining such behavior.

Logically, one would pursue those behaviors that would contribute to one's happiness (and well-being). But given that this happiness research has not concluded that materialism and selfishness are the path to happiness—quite the opposite, in fact—we have the rather strange situation in our society that irrational behavior is the norm.

The realities of behavior in our society relative to the findings of happiness research suggest that the “promptings of human nature” (to quote Thorstein Veblen) are playing little or no role in motivating behavior in our society. For if individuals were acting in a manner that accorded with their biologically-given natures, they would be engaging in the sorts of behaviors that researchers have linked to happiness.¹¹ The fact, then, that the dominant driving force in our society is the drive for “success”—developing one's abilities, but only as a means to maximize one's earning power—suggests that something other than human nature is behind this tendency.

A possible candidate for an explanation of this anomaly is one provided by Thorstein Veblen in one of his typically brilliant works, “Some Neglected Points in the Theory of Socialism.”¹² Veblen's starting point was the assumption that (p. 392) “Man as we find him to-day has much regard to his good fame—to his standing in the esteem of his fellow-men. This characteristic he always has had, and no doubt always will have.” That is, Veblen began his argument with the assumption that an abiding feature of human nature is that any human has an innate need to be thought of well by others. If one is living in a “primitive” society—or in a small town in contemporary [1892] America—one will know all other members of one's “community”—and those others will know you as well, of course. Thus, one will be judged by one's *behavior*—in the light of the mores that prevail in one's “community.”

The (p. 392) “existing [i.e., in 1892] organization of society,” however, presents difficulties in satisfying this need. What characterizes modern society is that it is becoming ever more urbanized. People are moving from rural areas to cities (with many immigrants also landing in cities), especially drawn by the industries located there, and in finding a place to live likely know none of their neighbors. Over time one may come to know some of one's neighbors, and be known by them. But what about the hundreds of others that one encounters—in stores, in theaters, while walking down the street, etc.? One will encounter numerous others whom one will *never* get to know. How does one “announce” to them the sort of person one is? Veblen's

¹¹ Interestingly, they would also be acting in accord with Biblical values (e.g., Job 29, Matthew 25, etc.) in that “doing for the neighbor” has been demonstrated to be a major source of happiness—even though acquiring for one's own use is constantly “pushed” in our society, and not only in advertisements.

¹² In (pp. 387 – 408) *The Place of Science in Modern Civilisation and Other Essays*. New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1918. This article originally appeared in the *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. II, 1892.

answer (p. 393): “To sustain one’s dignity—and to sustain one’s self-respect—under the eyes of people who are not socially one’s immediate neighbors, it is necessary to display the token of economic worth, which practically coincides pretty closely with economic success.”

What Veblen suggested, then, is that this tendency of “human nature”—developed under circumstances very unlike an urban-industrial society—will, in coming in contact with such a society, be forced to adjust, and the adjustment (in 1892) took the form of focusing one’s life on achieving economic success. For Veblen, however, that was not the goal. It was merely a means to the goal of being able to purchase many (expensive) things, and then displaying them—“conspicuously,” Veblen added. This would satisfy a psychological need that had developed millennia earlier—if not perfectly, then at least in the best possible manner under the circumstances. What Veblen apparently did not foresee is that a day would arise when money-making would be pursued more as a game than as a means of satisfying a psychological need—unless one thinks of high placement on a list of richest individuals as satisfying some sort of psychological need.¹³

Veblen, writing in 1892, did not have a body of happiness research to draw upon, and therefore was not able to discuss the matter in great detail. However, he did sense that the modern way of life was “out of whack” so far as human nature is concerned, and made numerous comments, in his various works, that relate to this matter. I agree with Veblen on the matter of our way of life being discordant with our “design specifications” (as developed via evolutionary processes). What I question, however, is that the societal situation should be regarded as the ultimate cause of the anomaly referred to earlier. Granted that the obsession with acquisition that can be observed today may have its roots in the earlier history of our country—that certain habitual ways of thinking that developed a century and more ago have been perpetuated down to the present (with the modification that it has acquired a “game” component). But can we explain this anomaly on the basis of a disjunction between human nature and societal characteristics—even by bringing in the historical factor? I would like to offer an alternate explanation here—one that has received its inspiration from Eugene Linden’s *Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies*.¹⁴

My starting point is the observation that ours is a high-pollution society—especially on a *per capita* basis. This is because our major energy source is petroleum: we use it to power our

¹³ I don’t. Rather, I think of a competitive ethos as being one with roots in the nature of the society—including its intellectual superstructure (e.g., Darwinian thinking). Which is why Prince Peter Kropotkin’s critique of Darwin (specifically Thomas H. Huxley, rather) was given little attention—despite its grounding in solid empirical observation.

¹⁴ A Seaver Book. New York: The Viking Press, 1979. I am referring especially to Parts II and III in Linden’s book (pp. 63 – 115).

automobiles (the usage of which is promoted by our living patterns and “individualism”) and trucks; we use it in producing goods; we use it as a raw material for producing chemicals; etc. Given that we value maximizing income, and then using much of it to buy things (the use of some being polluting), we are adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, thereby causing “global warming”—with the prospect (per, e.g., James Lovelock) that our species will be extinct (or nearly so) by the end of the century. Thus, it is not rational for us to continue to do so, but little prospect that we will change our ways—in time, at least.

Indeed, when one looks at Western history—especially through the eyes of Eugene Linden—one gains the impression that it has been a matter of adding ever more nails to the coffin. That is, what has been usually thought of as “progressive” development has had a dark side—making it ever more likely that we humans will bring about our own extinction. It’s as if some Force—e.g., Gaia?—realized that it had made a mistake in allowing humans to evolve, and having come to this recognition has ever since been “pulling the strings” of us human puppets to cause us to engage in activities that we would view positively, thus welcome—unaware that we were being manipulated into bringing about our eventual destruction.

Thus, this Force has enabled us to develop the means to destroy ourselves (especially via technological developments), has provided us with motivations that would guide our behavior in a self-destructive nature, has provided us with plenty of diversions so that we would not learn of the possible existence of this Force, etc. This Force was unable to prevent climate scientists such as James Hansen (of NASA) arising who would make dire predictions, warning us that unless we acted decisively within the next 10 years to reverse the trend, we might be doomed. But the Force “knew” that we humans had created so much infrastructure that could not be changed easily, and that we would not easily be persuaded to change our ways, that it would be successful in its efforts to destroy humans—so that we humans would go the way of the dinosaurs. Many other species would also perish, of course, but that was a small price to pay to rid Earth of humankind.

It is, course, “crazy” to talk about some sort of mysterious Force “out there” that not only has a mind, but a mind that had “decided” to rid Earth of that cancer, humankind. But (in this Darwin year, 2009) if Darwin could reify and personify Natural Selection, why can’t I “invent” a Force—just as Darwin invented Natural Selection¹⁵—and attribute some sort of decision-making ability to that Force?!

¹⁵ To say that Darwin “discovered” Natural Selection is tacitly to assert that natural selection (as *he* defined it, not, e.g., Ronald Fisher) actually occurs. Actually, it is highly doubtful that that sort of selection plays much of a role in Nature. For example, in explaining human evolution it likely has played no role whatsoever. Rather, the sorts of selection that have played a role are (1) environmental change (Stephen Stanley), (2) predation (Robert Sussman), and (3) sexual selection (Nancy Makepeace Tanner).

I don't mean here literally to suggest that some evil Force has been guiding Western (and now world) history, and leading it to the abyss. However, how else does one explain the fact that so many of the developments that have occurred after the Agricultural Revolution millennia ago have the effect of making our continuation as a species ever more doubtful? If I knew of a better explanation, I would accept it. But I don't!!

[March 9, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/false-consciousness-is-alive-well/>]

False Consciousness is Alive and Well

Alton C. Thompson

A major problem confronting those interested in effectuating societal change is that so many of their fellow citizens are afflicted with what Karl [Marx](#) termed “[false consciousness](#).” What this means especially is that their thinking is controlled by a variety of [Social Darwinism](#), one which asserts that what people are paid is what they *earn*—i.e., *deserve*. Given their acceptance of—or is it *possession* by?—this belief, they are convinced that:

- The rich are rich because they have made a significant contribution to the society—and therefore should be admired, even (virtually) worshiped.
- The poor are poor because they lack motivation, are lazy, etc. Therefore, not only should they not be provided with any kind of assistance or respect, but should be scorned, avoided, etc.

It’s not surprising that many who are rich hold such views; it *is* surprising, however, that many of modest means—and even with a “higher” education—hold those views. Case in point: Yesterday’s (March 7, 2012) *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (which some of us locals refer to as the *Milwaukee Urinal*—because it’s a piss-poor paper!) carried a column by a suburban retired chemical engineer—a man who, I presume, has at least a college degree—entitled “The 1% in America is Not the Problem.”

He began his column by noting that “those people [i.e., the 1%] are bad, according to the guys with the ‘Occupy’ signs. And that means that all the rest of us are the 99%, and we are good, although personally I prefer not to be lumped in the same category as the people who stand around complaining about rich folks.” We learn right away, then, that in the eyes of this man, those involved in the Occupy movement spend their time “standing around” complaining about rich folks. Those in the Occupy movement demonstrate, thereby, that they are not *productive* members of the society—but, of course, rich people *are* (or have been) productive members of the society, the fact that they are rich proving this.

Why do the rich have a lot of money? “They got rich mainly by investing in businesses and products, creating employment for others and, most important, satisfying their customers to a greater degree than their competition.” In this man’s mind the rich are all *business* people who have either created businesses—thereby providing employment to others—or have provided “seed” money to businesses, thereby enabling those businesses to get started—and thus provide employment to others.

Evidently he believes that government has played no role in supporting businesses—somehow not recognizing that our massive “defense” industry (which is actually *offensive*—in both senses of the word!) has made thousands of people rich. And evidently he has not been paying attention to the Republican primary races that have been occurring—during which one of Mitt Romney’s opponents referred to him as a “vulture capitalist.” Referred to him, that is, as a businessman, true, but one interested only in *making money*, and whose efforts have provided employment to others only *incidentally*—and not necessarily in the United States. A person whose patriotism, even, is in question, given that he has stashed money in Switzerland and the Cayman Islands, among other “offshore” locations.

In the middle of his column this gentleman asserts that “the real problem with the federal government isn’t a lack of revenue; it’s the obscene amount of money it spends.” However, in making that statement he makes no reference to *how* the government spends its money—the fact that about half of the budget is devoted to “defense” spending. Meaning that “corporate welfare” accounts for more of the budget than any other category. Evidently being on welfare isn’t a problem for him—if, that is, it’s the rich who are at the receiving end of that welfare!

The writer states that “the president [i.e., Barack Obama] wants the 1% to pay more [in taxes.] If you are inclined to agree with that, ask yourself if the federal government would spend that money better than the 1% would. Hardly. The 1% would likely spend it productively, because their motive is to grow and expand their businesses or to invest in other businesses to grow their assets. That’s good for all of us.”

Sounds plausible, doesn’t it? But where is the factual evidence in support of these claims? The author doesn’t provide any—evidently because he doesn’t want to embarrass himself. I would add that it’s obvious that he has never read [Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class*](#) (1899); indeed, he’s probably never even *heard* of Veblen, despite the fact that Veblen was born right here in Wisconsin (in [Cato](#)).

The individual concludes his column by stating: “Who knows how the federal government might spend it. Perhaps it would develop a plan to add high-speed rail from Milwaukee to Sheboygan [a small city to the north of Milwaukee].” What he’s alluding to in this last statement is that a plan for high-rail between Milwaukee and Madison had been developed, eventually to be extended south to Chicago and north to Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minnesota), but when (current) governor [Scott Walker](#) entered office, he squelched those plans. As a result, Wisconsin’s economic development may suffer—but at least Gov. Walker (who likely will be recalled soon—certainly *I* will be voting for his recall) can take credit for refusing federal funds, thereby saving taxpayer dollars (but . . .).

I am proud to have been born and raised in Wisconsin, but when I look at the current scene, it is easy to become depressed. On the one hand we have a governor (who, though, may soon be voted out!) who has been doing the bidding of the Koch brothers and other “fabulously” wealthy individuals. On the other hand we have citizens who, although with some degree of education, have been fooled into not recognizing their own interests, and fail to comprehend the realities of our society. The writer in question, for example, made no reference to the threat of global warming, and I suspect that this is because he is one of the “deniers” among us.

Oh, well, I know that such individuals are “set in their ways” and cannot be converted; thus, I will make no effort to try. Rather, I will simply ignore such people and proceed in doing what I believe needs to be done to adapt to the changes that will inevitably accompany global warming. Come to think of it, global warming may not be all bad; although it may cull most of the world’s population, it may especially “target” those afflicted with false consciousness. If that occurs, I will no longer regard [Charles Darwin’s](#) concept of “[natural selection](#)” as a scientifically worthless—and even evil—concept (in providing a basis for Social Darwinism). Rather, I would finally believe that the concept has real merit after all!

Appendix

The appearance of entitled “The 1% in America is Not the Problem.” column, by Jack Bruss in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Wednesday, March 7, 2012, on the one hand precipitated the present essay, written for the www.bravenewworld.in web site, and posted today (March 9). It also, however, caused me to send an email (on March 8) to Bruss (whose email address was given in his column)—and went this way:

Jack,

I am not a Catholic (and you may not be either), but I believe that this short article (published last year) by noted Marquette University theologian Daniel C. Maguire speaks to your column yesterday in the *Journal Sentinel*.

Al Thompson
Greendale

(The article that I had attached to my email was Dan’s “[The Gospel According to Paul Ryan](#),” dated July 14, 2011, on the www.religiondispatches.org web site).

Later in the day (of March 8) I received this response from Bruss:

From: Jack Bruss [<mailto:jackbruss@yahoo.com>]

Sent: Thursday, March 08, 2012 11:24 AM

To: Al Thompson

Subject: Re: Article by Dan Maguire

Hi Al:

No, I am not a catholic either, and my column has nothing to do with religion. Regarding the column by the Marquette theologian, it is, for lack of a better word,junk. In the very first paragraph, Maguire offers up 2 big lies—that Ryan’s plan "steals from the poor to give to the rich", and that it "would scuttle medicare." Still in paragraph 1 he adds that Ryan’s plan would "unleash the dogs of greed", whatever that means. After that he meanders around in typical liberal fashion with no particular point other than to say Conservatives and Ryan are bad. Like I said at the top—It's junk.

Thanks for reading my column and for the note. It was interesting.

ack

I then forwarded Jack’s response to Dan (at maguired@juno.com), introducing my email with these remarks:

Per Jack you write “junk”. Must say that I disagree!!!

Al

Then, later in the day I sent this to Dan:

Jack claims that his column has nothing to do with religion—demonstrating that he has a rather confined concept of “religion.” Unfortunately, he is not alone! I’d like to know what denomination—if any—he belongs to. Perhaps he is some sort of “evangelical”—most of whom seem to be candidates for the Tea Party.

Al

I am writing now at 9:47 A.M. on Friday morning (March 9), but have not yet hear from Dan. I expect that I will later today, however.

By 2:20 on Friday I still had not heard from Dan, and sent him this message:

Dan,

In pondering the meaning that Jack associates with “junk,” it occurs to me that this might be a theological acronym of which I was previously unaware—i.e., JUNK = “Just Uncuous^[16] (and) Nebulous (theology for) Kairoi”—with no universal value, to say nothing of present value. Of course, I could be wrong—I was once before.

Al

When I got up on Saturday morning, I composed and sent the following to Dan (having not yet heard from him:

Dear Dan,

While surfing the internet recently, I came across the Preface to your *Ethics: A Complete Guide for Moral Choice*, and while reading that Preface realized that I have developed a perspective on “the good” that is somewhat unique. It is a perspective that draws heavily upon the thinking of many others, but differs from the perspective of anyone else.

I have presented that perspective most fully in my [What Are Churches For?](#), written and posted last year. To summarize my view, however, I would say that it consists of two assumptions in particular—(1) that our thinking about the good has an evolutionary basis, and (2) that decisions about what “should” be done are best made in a (particular) community situation—whether the

¹⁶ One meaning for “unctuous” is “revealing, or marked by, a smug, ingratiating, and false earnestness or spirituality.”

acting agent is the community itself or an individual member of that community (“particular” here defined shortly).

In the eBook I argue that a co-development occurred with humans and their way of life, so that prior to the Agricultural Revolution humans developed certain “design specifications”—and had a way of life that accorded with them. As a consequence, they had physical and emotional well-being.

With the Agricultural Revolution (which occurred in part in response to the development of human intellect, in part to “accident”), ways of life began to change, but human biology remained basically the same. As a consequence, the stimuli and behaviors associated with these new ways of life, being “unnatural,” resulted in ill-being for many members of a given society (with societies themselves becoming ever more large in population size). Put another way, a Discrepancy began to grow between the way of life for which we had become “designed” and the way of life we were forced to live. This applied especially to the masses (for stratification was now beginning to occur), but even members of the “elite” now lacked a “natural” way of life, which fact had implications for their thinking and behavior. (I attribute this concept to Thorstein Veblen, as I note in the eBook.)

This Discrepancy did, however, have *positive* elements, among them the rise of “prophets” who sensed that something was amiss and made an effort to restore (unknown to them) a more “natural” way of life; in the case of what was occurring in Palestine, the prophets enlisted a God on their side to add force to their “commands” regarding what should be done—the result being a “conversion” of the religion then existing to one with an ethical orientation (see my Chapter 2).

Our tasks today, I believe, are to recognize, on the one hand, that our ways of life are discordant to our (unchanging) “design specifications,” and that we thereby need to change those ways of life—and for two reasons: To have well-being, and to survive as a species (for given the threat of “global warming,” and the likelihood that “runaway” is now occurring, our only choice now is to engage in efforts to adapt to the changes that will inevitably be occurring—which efforts will necessarily result in way-of-life changes, a point that James Lovelock seemingly fails to realize).

To have well-being, we need to be knowledgeable regarding our “design specifications,” and the interesting thing about those “specs” is that *objective* statements cannot be made about them. A variety of views exist about our “design specs,” and I use Chapters 3 and 4 to bring out that fact.

Some might be bothered by the fact that objectivity is lacking here, but I am not—for I believe that the best way to make decisions about what “should” be done is to do so in the context of a New Word Fellowship (NeWF), which I introduced in my 2007 “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#),” written under the name James B. Gray. (My ebook refers to the same institution

as a Structured Interaction Group {SIG}, but I prefer NeWF because of its religious connotations—i.e., allusion to the Holy Spirit).

I perceive the NeWF as not only a vehicle for making (“good”) *decisions*—for the group involved and/or individual members of the group—but “merely” for interacting. Indeed, I perceive that NeWF participation can have all sorts of positive benefits for those participating—some of which I list and discuss in “Worship.” Indeed, I would go so far as to assert that if Christianity had adopted the NeWF as its “worship service”—rather than having a priest/minister babble on about something or other—world history would have unfolded in a very different (and much better!) manner. (The fact that the NeWF is based in part on ideas developed by a Marcus centuries ago—see p. 44—gives some plausibility to the claim that a very different sort of “service” *could* have become associated with Christianity.)

Regards,

Al Thompson

P.S. In your Preface you state: “Humans are the only species with the talent to totally wreck the earth or to turn it into a garden. Ethical choices will decide that.” I would respond to this by arguing that we are in our precarious situation not so much as a matter of “choices” but because “one thing leads to another.” That is, certain discoveries and inventions occurred, and these led to further developments—including the use of coal as a fuel, then petroleum, which uses had the unintentional side effect of increasing the carbon content of the atmosphere, to the point of causing negative feedback mechanisms to give way to positive feedback ones, thereby propelling us to disaster. We did not know that we were violating the “Do not kill” command, but in fact have killed-off many species already, and have engaged in actions that will likely decimate the human population by 2100 CE (per, e.g., James Lovelock).

The ethical person today will, I believe, not only recognize the above, but will recognize that we must do all we can to reduce the number of premature deaths that will—and I *do* mean will—result from “global warming.” S/he will recognize, in addition, that this can only be done by (1) determining what must be done to adapt—and then (2) acting on those decisions. I have been trying, over the past few years, to orient my thinking in that direction, write about it, and otherwise do what I can to help “save” as many lives as possible.

Unlike Jack Bruss, I respect your opinions, Dan, and would therefore welcome whatever comments you would care to make about any of the above.

When I arrived at work this morning (March 12), I first checked my Astronautics email, and then my mail.com email (the latter having been used on Saturday to send my last email to Dan), but found nothing from Dan at either site. I suspect that the reason for this is that he not in town at present.

[March 19, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/03/19/newfism-a-religion-for-the-twenty-first-century/>]

NeWFism: A Religion for the Twenty-First Century

Alton C. Thompson

Over my 72 years of existence I have had occasion to have contact with at least a dozen Christian denominations; and although I have found some appealing elements in some of them (e.g., the adult discussion group of a United Methodist church of which I used to be a member, the “philosophy” behind Quaker religious meetings), my general conclusion is that none of those denominations has enough to offer to justify its continued existence. In effect, what I am declaring here is that I can see no reason why Christianity should not be abandoned.¹⁷

I suspect that many who have been associated with *other* religions could make the same declaration regarding *their own* religion, and I say to them: *Why don't we recognize that we have much in common, and simply initiate a new religion?* A religion that will be welcoming to anyone, regardless if they are theists or atheists, Republican or Democrat (to refer to American politics), straight or gay, white or red or yellow or black or green, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, etc., etc.

About five years ago I introduced (in “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#)”¹⁸) a new institution (the New Word Fellowship—i.e., the NeWF) and introduced it as a specifically *religious* institution. Then, last year (in my [What Are Churches For?](#)) I gave that institution a different name—the Structured Interaction Group (SIG)—because I wanted to make clear that it need not be thought of as *just* a religious institution, or *even* one. However, although I perceive the NeWF (or SIG, if you prefer) as *more* than a religious institution, I continue to perceive it as primarily an institution of a religious nature. What that reflects, I suppose, is that for me “religious” is a word that encompasses virtually all of reality: Life is a religious activity, whether we choose to so recognize it or not.

The fact that I am proposing the creation of a new religion implies that I perceive specific flaws in existing Christian denominations; thus it is incumbent upon me to identify those flaws. Of course, the list that *I* create will not necessarily coincide with lists created by others—my list is,

¹⁷ I am currently reading Bart D. Ehrman’s *Forged: Writing in the Name of God--Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (2011), and it occurs to me that if this abandonment occurred, those who currently are engaged in preaching, Bible research, etc., would need to begin doing something more productive! (I don’t mean to “pick” on Ehrman here; I sent him an email yesterday (March 12, 2012), and received a reply today: He’s truly a “Carolina gentleman”!

¹⁸ Written using the pen name James B. Gray.

of necessity, a *subjective* one. I suspect, however, that a great deal of overlap exists between my list of deficiencies and that of many others who have been associated with one or more Christian denominations. And that members of other religions will be relate to at least some of the items on my list.

Let me, then, begin by listing some of the problems that I have detected with the Christian denominations with which I have had some contact:

- Most have congregations that exhibit a high degree of homogeneity. In some cases the homogeneity may be in terms of ethnic background—e.g., Catholic churches whose members are primarily Italian in ethnic heritage, Baptist churches with members having a Welsh ethnic heritage, Lutheran churches whose members have a Norwegian-Swedish heritage, etc. In some cases the homogeneity may be racial—e.g., inner-city churches whose membership is predominantly black, simply because racial segregation makes such homogeneity virtually inevitable.

The type of homogeneity that especially bothers me, however, is that of an “intellectual” nature—the fact that a *belief system* tends to be associated with most denominations (Quakers being the only denomination of which I am aware for whom creedalism is not an important issue¹⁹). On the one hand, having a certain definite belief system has the effect of building a wall between *our* belief system and *yours*. That is, belief systems tend to create *barriers* between people, not *bridges*—and my passion is to build bridges. On the other hand, belief systems create *hypocrites*: Each of us has a unique belief system, and that belief system will often “evolve” over time; by forcing individuals to claim agreement with a given set of “factual” statements, one forces them to become hypocrites—and I see no virtue in that. Quite the contrary, indeed!

- The “facts” constituting a given belief system that one is expected to accept may be utterly lacking in empirical support. For example, most Christian denominations require that one believe that Jesus, upon being executed by the Romans, was buried in a tomb, but then several days later emerged from the tomb alive, and then at a still later point ascended to Heaven.

However, if Jesus existed (which some scholars question²⁰—but I don’t), and the Romans crucified him, his body would not have been placed in a tomb. Dead people don’t “just” come to life several days after dying. “Heaven” is an assumed place, not one with

¹⁹ This is not to say that certain beliefs and values are not associated with Quakerism—for, e.g., Quakers (i.e., “Friends”) are especially noted for being anti-violence (as I am reminded every day by a brochure on my desk). However, this is more a *value* than a *belief*, and I am not aware of the Quakers as having a formal creed to which all members are expected to give assent.

²⁰ For example, Thomas L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David*, 2005.

empirical support. Etc. In too many cases one is asked to accept certain “truths” on the basis of “faith” rather than evidence—a proposition that is noxious, insulting, in fact, to anyone living in this Age of Science.

- Most denominations have certain rituals which congregants are expected to participate in during a given “service.”²¹ These rituals may have been invented centuries ago, and this fact is used to justify their continuation. The problem is that a ritual created centuries ago may have had significance for people back then, but that does not mean that it will have significance for us moderns. In fact, it likely has *no* significance for us moderns—though for some an ancient ritual may have some psychological benefit (i.e., may be “comforting”).
- Although the instrumental and organ music that one hears in a church may be uplifting, the hymns that one is asked to sing rarely are, may have banal lyrics—and may, in effect, *force* one to say that one believes certain “truths” when, in fact, one does not. May, that is, force one to be a hypocrite.
- When I lived in Maryland and Ohio, I attended United Presbyterian churches, all three of which had outstanding ministers at the time—individuals who delivered intelligent, thoughtful sermons with passion and conviction. However, I have also, over the years, heard numerous boring sermons—most recently at a Unitarian-Universalist service here in Milwaukee, which I attended with a friend.

Why are sermons boring? Because they lack relevance to what’s going on in the world, and what specific concerns congregants have. And why is that? Most ministers have a “theological” training, but are not otherwise well-educated. And even if they are knowledgeable, both as to academics and world affairs, they may be reluctant to discuss the relevant for fear that they will say something controversial, and thereby lose some congregants—i.e., their means of support.

- The subject of sermons brings up another important problem with the typical Christian “service”: Why is it necessary to have sermons anyway?²² Is this not a holdover from past years when most people were illiterate, and could only learn by being instructed by others?

²¹ A term to which I object—given that no service to one’s fellow humans occurs during the typical church religious meeting!

²² Years ago, I attended, with a friend, a Quaker religious meeting, and there *was* no sermon! Instead, people sat quietly waiting for someone who felt “led” to say something stand up and do so. During the meeting that I attended, I believe that three people did—one of them a young woman who got up and played something on her guitar.

What I have found of most value, in attending a church, is adult discussion groups—and I have in mind here especially the adult discussion group of the United Methodist church in Greenfield, Wisconsin, that I was a part of for 29 years, and often led. The ministers that were there during that time period were also excellent (until the last one, causing us to leave that church); but it was this adult discussion group which especially “pulled” me to this church. I will grant that at times it is of value to be “talked at,” but have become convinced that interaction among people is of even more value—as a general principle. Therefore, the NeWF, is designed as an institution that emphasizes “controlled” interaction, and sees certain desirable *consequences* associated with that interaction. The traditional Christian religious meeting, in contrast, seems to have been designed with *no* discernable goals in mind: “*We do things this way because that’s the way things have always been done.*”

I have probably not exhausted the possibilities so far as flaws with Christian religious meetings are concerned—and what are “flaws” to me may not be to others. But *I* perceive problems, and—having some Viking blood in me—am not content simply to “sit back and take it.” When I wrote “Worship” (cited above) about five years ago, I presented it as a religious institution; now, I take a further step by suggesting that the New Word Fellowship²³ (NeWF) be made the centerpiece of a religion—to be called NeWFism (what else?!).

The relevant portion of my “Worship” paper is this part:

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²³ The “New Word” part of this name refers to the fact that those who participate in a NeWF are looking for *revelations*. That is, rather than looking to a Holy Book as an authority, they look to present-day revelation. Ironically, however, the basis for this claim comes from statements attributed to Jesus in the gospel of John, chapters 14, 15, and 16 (the reference to a “Helper,” as one translation has it). I need, however, to add that although this is how *I* conceive the NeWF, I would insist that one need not accept this interpretation to be welcomed as a member of a given NeWF: When I say that *all* are welcome in a NeWF, that’s exactly what I mean. The only requirement for NeWF participation is that one accept the “rules of the game” for NeWFs.

The “heart” of my discussion is contained in sections 1 – 4, wherein I discuss the nature of the NeWF; and as I have nothing to add to that discussion here, I will, rather, conclude this essay by identifying what I regard as the principal ways in which NeWFism differs from conventional Christianity—meaning that if you want to learn about NeWFism, you will need to read the relevant portions of my “Worship” essay!:

- NeWFism is not centered on the person of Jesus—or any other person, for that matter. During NeWF discussions it’s likely that reference will be made to various individuals, past and/or present, but what a NeWF is “about” is *structured interaction*, not Jesus or any other personage.
- No belief system is associated with a NeWF. As a consequence, a given NeWF may contain theists, atheists—and even those for whom the question of whether or not there is a god(s) is simply not of interest.
- Any rituals that a NeWF would have would be ones chosen by those who participate in the NeWF.
- No prayers would be offered—for prayers might offend some participants.
- A NeWF would have no Holy Book (e.g., the Bible). Sources of authority for participants would be science, the Holy Spirit (for those who believe that there is such a being), “gut feelings,” etc.
- No singing would occur—because most singing involves lyrics, and lyrics often involve theological statements with which only some participants might agree.
- NeWFian meetings would consist of two parts—reflecting the fact that the ideal size of a NeWF is about 12 people, but that a given NeWFian “*congregation*” might consist of dozens, even hundreds, of members. One part would be the *general* part, the other the *specific* part.

Once members of a given congregation had assembled, and assume that Congregation X consists of 110 members, all of whom are present on a given meeting day (whenever that happens to be), as people enter, the “Bishop” would have each write his/her name on a small slip of paper, and deposit it in a container (such as a Green Bay Packers cap!²⁴). After some preliminaries, the Bishop would draw 12 slips of paper from the container, those individuals forming Group A for the day, with the first name drawn being designated Leader (or Prophet, or whatever). The Bishop would continue this procedure to form Groups B – G, with Groups H and I different from the other groups only in having 13 members rather than 12. The congregation will have provided private spaces

²⁴ OK, I’ll admit, I’m more provincial than I’d like to admit!

that would accommodate at least 9 groups, and each of the 9 groups thusly formed would go to their designated areas, and proceed with their NeWFian sessions.

NeWFian sessions would cease after about an hour, with the Bishop then ringing a bell²⁵ to indicate that it was now time for the congregation to meet as a congregation—which they would then do. During this congregational portion of the meeting there might be announcements, special presentations (such as short lectures, special instrumental music, etc.), etc., and following this there might very well be a time for socializing.

So far as I know, no NeWFian congregation has yet formed—and you may very well ask: *“If you believe so strongly in NeWFism, why haven’t you started one?!”*

Good question! Wish I could provide an honest answer to it! My excuses are that I am in a family situation that would make this difficult for me to do, I don’t have an entrepreneurial personality (which is not to say that I regard this as a business!), I lack resources, etc. I am hopeful, however, that *someone* “out there” will perceive the need for getting a NeWFian movement started, will not be encumbered as I am—and will start one. Keep in mind that your background need not be in Christianity to do so.

[After sending this essay to Sufyan, and while taking a short walk at noon, it occurred to me is that the essence of NeWFism is that it implicitly “holds up: the “love of neighbor” command as what religion *per se* should be about—and that it is not enough simply to accept that principle in the abstract. One must develop “habits of thought” (Thorstein Veblen) that favor an attitude of tolerance, and even love, for others—and NeWF participation is an excellent vehicle for developing such habits. As my discussion in “Worship” attempts to make clear, NeWF participation can have a great *variety* of consequences; indeed, my discussion may have overlooked some important ones. But among those consequences—as, indeed, *the most important* one—is this development of a certain “stance” toward life that will be fruitful—not only for others, but for oneself as well. What *that* makes clear is that NeWFism, although having a spiritual²⁶ quality, is decidedly this-worldly in its orientation.

I would add that Paul recognized that it is not enough to just recognize, intellectually, that one should love the neighbor, and in Galatians 5 not only indicated that (what he called) “human nature” prevented one from following that law, but asserted that being filled with the Holy Spirit

²⁵ Or use some other procedure to alert those present that it was time to terminate the NeWFian meetings.

²⁶ One might, I suppose, say that it is “spiritual” in the sense that its preference is to perceive other people as spirits, and that one of the consequences of NeWF participation is to help one so perceive others. The rationale behind this is that if one thusly perceives others, one’s behavior relative to others will be positively affected.

enabled one to have a positive outlook and, thereby, engage in positive behaviors. What Paul failed to add, however, is any commentary on *how* one might become Spirit-filled.

As I note in the latter part of my “Worship” paper, I anticipate a great variety of consequences for those who participate in a NeWF—with those consequences having, in turn, positive consequences for those with whom one interacts while living one’s life outside the NeWF. One of the consequences I identify is the possibility of becoming Spirit-filled while involved in NeWF participation. Thus, I believe that the NeWF answers a question that Paul failed to answer (because he *had* no answer!), and adds numerous other possible positive consequences to the list. Thus, I feel justified in having so much confidence that NeWFism has tremendous potential for changing the course of world history.]

Appendix

Here's an exchange between Bart Ehrman and myself that just took place; I include it here because I had referred to Bart in my first footnote for this essay:

As you probably know, geography graduates from UNC make on average the highest salaries of any major at the school. On average. Thank you Michael Jordan....

Bart D. Ehrman
James A. Gray Professor
Department of Religious Studies
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

DID JESUS EXIST? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth

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For info. on my books, speaking engagements and more, www.bartdehrman.com

From: Al Thompson [<mailto:A.Thompson@astronautics.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, March 13, 2012 11:44 AM

To: Ehrman, Bart D

Subject: RE: resurrection

Dr. Ehrman,

It amazes me how you find time in your busy schedule to respond to inquiries like mine—but I appreciate it! You are a true “Carolina gentleman.” (Well, I hope not! I learned the meaning of that term while at UNC from 1963 – 1965, working on an M. A. in Geography. You don’t drink or say “Fook Duke,” do you?!)

Al

From: Ehrman, Bart D [<mailto:behrman@email.unc.edu>]

Sent: Monday, March 12, 2012 6:30 PM

To: Al Thompson

Subject: RE: resurrection

Al,

Thanks for your note. Sounds like you've had an interesting journey. I don't think pagan fertility cults really had much of anything to do with ideas of Jesus' resurrection. I talk about all this a bit in a book coming out next week, called Did Jesus Exist. Specifically, I think the disciples were already Jewish apocalypticists who subscribed to the idea of "resurrection" (unlike pagans); my guess is that soon after Jesus' death (a week or two later?) one or more of his disciples had a vision (or dream interpreted as a vision?) of Jesus (much as my grandfather "saw" my grandmother a couple of weeks after her funeral) and interpreted that as meaning that Jesus was still alive. And still alive, for a Jewish apocalypticist, meant raised from the dead. So the resurrection has started, and will be completed soon. Maybe next week.

Best,
Bart Ehrman

Bart D. Ehrman
James A. Gray Professor
Department of Religious Studies
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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For info. on my books, speaking engagements and more, www.bartdehrman.com

From: Al Thompson [<mailto:A.Thompson@astronautics.com>]

Sent: Monday, March 12, 2012 10:36 AM

To: Ehrman, Bart D

Subject: resurrection

Dear Dr. Ehrman,

I have just completed your *Misquoting Jesus*, and about to finish your *Forged*—wish I could write like you! I, too, have an evangelical background—my parents having been raised in a Norwegian Lutheran church, but left it to start the Assemblies of God church in Wautoma, Wisconsin (which has a Thompson Hall named after my dad). I have grown much more liberal in my thought, to the point of regarding religious questions as of little interest and importance—in comparison with the likelihood that global warming will wipe out most of our species before the century is out, so that it's much more important to focus my mind on what to do to adapt to that eventuality. (See my recent "[Salvation for the 21st Century](#).")

I have, however, the bad habit of not being able to get religious matters out of my mind, and with the approach of Easter am curious to know your opinion regarding when the idea of Jesus's resurrection entered one of the early Jesus movements. Mack (1996) seems to argue that a Jesus movement in the

Antioch area “morphed” into a “christ cult” and created this idea—an idea that, I assume, was borrowed from one of the vegetation cults (in which, however, the death occurred in the fall, and “resurrection” in the spring).

Do you have an opinion on how this concept got into a Jesus movement, when, and why? I have read at least four of your books now, and don’t recall you saying anything about this—although at 72 my memory is getting bad!

Best regards

Al Thompson
Greendale, WI

P. S. I like the fact that in *Forged* you bring out the fact that no early information exists in Aramaic. The implication is that given that the sources that we have are in Greek, distortion in the original stories would have come from the fact that stories get changed as they are told from one person to another (the “telephone” game that we used to play as kids), and distortion would have been involved in translating from Aramaic to Greek. It seems to me that these two facts together mean that knowing anything definite about Jesus is virtually impossible. (I haven’t seen your most recent book, so I don’t know if you comment on that there.)

Alton C. ("Al") Thompson

Document Management Administrator
(414) 449-4072
"Dedicated to leaving a paper trail."

On Wednesday morning, after arriving at work (at 6:00 A.M.) I wrote and sent this to Bart:

Dr. Ehrman,

Although I’m not privy to the thinking and research behind your view of resurrection (expressed below), I find it highly plausible—because it locates the concept early on in the movement.

The only explanation that I had read before is that the concept was drawn from one or more of the Mysteries that were popular at that time in the Mediterranean area. If that were the case, it would have to have been a gentile convert who introduced the idea, so that it wouldn’t have entered the movement until the 50s (I assume).

In addition, a problem with the Mystery explanation is that with the Mysteries a death occurred in the fall, and a rebirth in the spring—but that does not fit the story that developed relative to Jesus.

You mention that you only touch on this subject in your new book. Has, however, someone developed a good rationale for this argument—one that would be readily accessible to me? If so, I would like to learn who has, and where it is.

Best regards,

Al Thompson
UNC '65 (M. A.)

Just a few minutes after sending the above, Bart provided me with the following response:

I have a chunk of a chapter devoted to it in the book. I don't know of a popular level treatment, I'm sorry to say, but in my discussion I do refer to a couple of the more scholarly assessments and summarize them. Best,

- B
-

Bart D. Ehrman
James A. Gray Professor
Department of Religious Studies
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

[I will not be sending this to Sufyan]

The Background Thinking Behind NeWFism

Alton C. Thompson

The “Golden Rule”²⁷—or, in its negative version, the “Silver Rule”²⁸—is a [principle](#) of ancient vintage, found in many cultures. It is, however, a principle that plays little role in this ostensibly Jewish/“Christian” country—and likely for a variety of reasons. One version of the principle is that one should love one’s neighbor as one loves oneself (found, e.g., in [Leviticus 19:18](#) and [Mark 12:31](#)), and several reasons can be cited as to why this principle is honored more in the breach than in actuality (in addition to the fact that the society that one lives in imposes certain behavioral expectations on one that may be contrary to this principle).

A major reason for the principle being given little heed is that there is a tendency to interpret the principle narrowly—interpreting its meaning as circumscribed thusly: “*One should be courteous, considerate, respectful relative to the people who you encounter in everyday life.*” The problems with such an interpretation are that:

- Its orientation is of a *neutral*, rather than *positive*, nature. In [Matthew 25:31-46](#) Jesus commands us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, invite strangers in, clothe those needing clothes, take care of the sick, and visit those in prison. The above interpretation, however, excuses one from engaging in any of those actions.
- It is *individualistic* in that specifies how one should interact with those specific other individuals with whom one has direct contact. Whereas the ancient law of, e.g., the tithe (as described in [Deuteronomy 14:22 – 29](#)) had a *societal* orientation, the above interpretation has no such orientation.
- It is *time-limited* in that it specifies that one’s only concern is the *here-and-now*—i.e., the immediate present. It shows no interest in the *future*—and in that respect is “out of tune” with the writings of the [Hebrew prophets](#) of old.

An additional reason why more people in our society fail to heed the “love of neighbor” law is that they fail to “personalize” the law—perhaps not being encouraged to do so by the religious leaders to whom they have been exposed.²⁹ Just as Paul of Tarsus, centuries ago, recognized (I

²⁷ Do unto others as you would like to be done unto.

²⁸ Do not do unto others as you would not like to be done unto.

²⁹ Meaning, therefore, that the *primary* responsibility for this failure lies with religious leaders.

Corinthians 12) that different people have different “gifts,”³⁰ so would I today insist that people vary in their “gifts,” and that, therefore, it is to be expected that each person who takes the “love of neighbor” principle seriously would interpret in a manner that “fits” that person. How do people vary? I would identify the following as among the important ways in which individuals differ one from another:

- *Personality.* (A shy person is not well equipped to visit people in prison.)
- *Interests.* (One lacking an interest in visiting the sick should probably choose some other way to follow the “love of neighbor” command.)
- *Abilities.* (One with an ability to communicate with others and with medical training would likely find that s/he would enjoy visiting the sick, and might even be able to offer useful medical advice.)
- *Experience.* (If a Habitat for Humanity project is about to commence near where one lives, one has carpentry experience, and vacation time available, one should consider lending one’s services to the project.)
- *Situation.* (If one works in a canning factory, and thereby has access to “seconds” that can be obtained at little or no cost to oneself, one should purchase/take what one can to donate to a local food bank.)

What the above suggests is that each of us for whom the “love of neighbor” command is one to be taken seriously needs to engage in self-examination, and determine that which *we* are best qualified to do by criteria such as the above. Rather than allowing others to tell us what we should do, we should have the courage to make this sort of decision for ourselves—and also have the wisdom to refrain from telling others what they “must” do.

In my case, I have determined that the sort of contribution that I can make is one that is primarily of an *intellectual* nature. Thus, I see my contribution to date as threefold, and described mainly (or at least most completely³¹) in my [What Are Churches For?](#)

³⁰ ⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.³⁰

³¹ I have also, however, written numerous essays over the past few months, all available at this web site: www.bravenewworld.in/author/thompson.

- I have developed the concept of human “design specifications” (see Chapter 2) by identifying and describing the ideas presented by various individuals (see Chapter 3), including myself (see Chapter 4).
- I argue (following the thinking of British scientist [James Lovelock](#)) that the phenomena associated with “global warming” are likely to result in a severe culling of the human population by 2100 CE, that the changes that will be inevitably associated with “global warming” cannot be halted, so that, therefore, our only option now, as humans, is to try to adapt as best we can (see Chapter 5). In Chapter 7 I present a strategy³² for addressing this matter.
- I have devised an institution—called the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) in my “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#),³³” and the Structured Interaction Group (SIG) in (Chapter 8) of my *What Are Churches For?*—that on the one hand can function as a vehicle for planning (for, e.g., adaptation), but can also function as a vehicle simply for interaction. In addition, it (and specifically the NeWF) can serve as a substitute for a church “service”—a point that I develop in my recent “NeWFism: A Religion for the Twenty-First Century.

My preferred term for the institution that I have developed is New Word Fellowship rather than Structured Interaction Group. For although both are apt terms for the institution, the latter is a purely secular term that is simply descriptive of the nature of the institution, whereas the former alludes to revelation. That is, if one perceives the institution *just* as a religious institution, the implication embedded in the “New Word” part of the term is that an allusion is being made to present-day revelation. Thus, I think of the NeWF as comparable to a Quaker religious meeting in that in both cases the source of authority is thought of as residing not in a Holy Book *per se* but, rather, in present-day revelation. Ironically, however, the basis for this assertion comes from the gospel of John (!), Chapters 14, 15, and 16—wherein Jesus states that upon his leaving, he will leave behind a Helper, the Holy Spirit.

I think of NeWF participants as sitting in a circle, there being a lit candle placed in the center of that circle—to symbolize God, a real, if intangible, REALITY. And although the speaker for a given session would say what s/he felt “led” (by the Holy Spirit) to say, I suspect that often, if not always, that speech would pertain to the “love the neighbor” command in some manner. That is why I “hold up” the NeWF as an institution capable of helping us take that command seriously—as individuals, and as members of NeWF groups.

³² Based primarily on an article that I wrote 28 years ago: “Ecotopia: A ‘Gerendipitous’ Scenario,” *Transition: The Quarterly Journal of S.E.R.G.E.* (The Socially & Ecologically Responsible Geographers), Vol. 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 2 – 8.

³³ I wrote this using the pen name James B. Gray.

Given that the NeWF can be used for other than religious purposes, my recommendation is that when this is the case, it be referred to as a Structured Interaction Group (SIG) rather than a NeWF, and that no candle (representing God) be placed at the center of the group. On the other hand, if members of a given NeWFian congregation insist that their lives are sacred, holy (which they *are*, of course!), they may wish to use only the term New Word Fellowship for their uses of that institution.

I should note here that after I sent my NeWFism paper to Sufyan, I wrote the following (and added at the end of my copy of the paper—the one in the New Book):

After sending this essay to Sufyan, and while taking a short walk at noon, it occurred to me is that the essence of NeWFism is that it implicitly “holds up: the “love of neighbor” command as what religion *per se* should be about—and that it is not enough simply to accept that principle in the abstract. One must develop “habits of thought” (Thorstein Veblen) that favor an attitude of tolerance, and even love, for others—and NeWF participation is an excellent vehicle for developing such habits. As my discussion in “Worship” attempts to make clear, NeWF participation can have a great *variety* of consequences; indeed, my discussion may have overlooked some important ones. But among those consequences—as, indeed, *the most important* one—is this development of a certain “stance” toward life that will be fruitful—not only for others, but for oneself as well. What *that* makes clear is that NeWFism, although having a spiritual³⁴ quality, is decidedly this-worldly in its orientation.

I would add that Paul recognized that it is not enough to just recognize, intellectually, that one should love the neighbor, and in Galatians 5 not only indicated that (what he called) “human nature” prevented one from following that law, but asserted that being filled with the Holy Spirit enabled one to have a positive outlook and, thereby, engage in positive behaviors. What Paul failed to add, however, is any commentary on *how* one might become Spirit-filled.

As I note in the latter part of my “Worship” paper, I anticipate a great variety of consequences for those who participate in a NeWF—with those consequences having, in turn, positive consequences for those with whom one interacts while living one’s life outside the NeWF. One of the consequences I identify is the possibility of becoming Spirit-filled while involved in NeWF participation. Thus, I believe that the NeWF answers a question that Paul failed to answer (because he *had* no answer!), and adds numerous other possible positive consequences to the list. Thus, I feel justified in having so much confidence that NeWFism has tremendous potential for changing the course of world history.

³⁴ One might, I suppose, say that it is “spiritual” in the sense that its preference is to perceive other people as spirits, and that one of the consequences of NeWF participation is to help one so perceive others. The rationale behind this is that if one thusly perceives others, one’s behavior relative to others will be positively affected.

As a further note here, I have long believed that if people are to behave in a positive manner relative to others, it is not enough that they learn a set of rules. In addition, it is important that they be raised right (as Jean Liedloff has made clear), and Paul was right in asserting that if one is filled with the Holy Spirit, one will behave positively toward others. However, I would add that if one has the appropriate *experiences*, this can cause one to develop “habits of thought” (to allude to Thorstein Veblen)—and of perception—that will lead to positive behaviors; in a sense, such experiences can “brand” one in the sense of Jeremiah 31:31 – 34.

As to what sorts of experiences can do this for a person, what I would single out in particular is *interaction* experiences. But most “formal” interaction experiences—such as the adult class at the church I attend—are not “set up” in a manner that has involved any careful thought about the matter of whether there is a good way to control the interaction. Usually, in fact, there is no control at all (except that the leader might provide some direction), so that some people dominate the conversation, and some are given no chance to say anything—or are not *encouraged* to say anything. The reason that I advocate the NeWF is that it has a set of rules, and those rules are designed to maximize the value of interaction with others; the interaction that occurs in a NeWF can lead to its members learning to tolerate, like, and even love, one another, and can have numerous other benefits as well (including the Spirit-filling that Paul discussed!)—as I discuss toward the end of “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#).”

As to my own particular “theory” of Jesus and Christianity (also of importance for understanding my NeWFian proposal³⁵), I perceive Jesus as a person who was in the prophetic tradition. His “target,” however, was not the *political* leader of his society (i.e., the Roman governor) but, rather, the *religious* leaders. His quarrel with these leaders is that they were promulgating an inverted—and therefore *perverted*—version of the Law, one that taught “blame the victim” rather than love the neighbor/victim.

To rid themselves of this pest, the religious leaders decided that their “dirty work” was best (for their own protection) accomplished by the Romans. Therefore, they devised a plan for convincing the Roman leadership that Jesus was a threat to *them*, the Roman leadership “fell” for this trickery, arrested Jesus, and then executed him by crucifixion.

After Jesus’s death there may have been but one group that emerged (“[The Way](#)”) having the intent to carry forward Jesus’s “ministry.” But over time several groups developed, each claiming to continue that ministry most authentically. However, also over time the “Jesus groups” that

³⁵ In the ensuing discussion it is not my intention to deny the influence of Discrepancy/design specification ideas (discussed in my ebook) on my thinking, but the fact of the matter is that my interest in my Judaeo-Christian heritage takes precedence over that body of ideas.

existed became more and more oriented to proper *belief*—so that Christianity was becoming ever less the religion *of* Jesus (interpreted variously), and ever more a religion *about* him, with each group developing its own particular belief system. Indeed, [Hegesippus](#) [c110 – c180], writing in the latter part of the second century, was able to identify 80 “heretical” Jesus groups in addition to his own “orthodox” group—“heresy” being thought of as dangerously wrong belief.

Early in the fourth century the emperor [Constantine](#) [272 – 337] converted to Christianity—a version of Christianity, of course, that had a belief orientation; and during his reign that version of Christianity—a version that had little, if any, relationship with Jesus’s ministry—became the favored version throughout the Empire. Then, in the latter part of the century, while [Theodosius](#) [347 – 395] was emperor, that version was made the official religion of the empire. It was during this period that the (blasphemous) [Apostles’ Creed](#) came into existence—a creed that assumed that what Christianity was “about,” primarily, was correct belief (i.e., *orthodoxy*) rather than correct behavior (i.e., *orthopraxy*). That is, Christianity became a religion with only a tangential relationship with Jesus’s ministry.

Since the fourth century an orientation to “correct” belief has been dominant in Christianity—even as the Protestant Reformation resulted in monolithic Catholicism giving way to a variety of Christian denominations. The religion *of* Jesus—his focus on love of neighbor as being the “heart” of religion—has not been suppressed entirely, but has been downplayed in favor of “correct” belief, certain practices, and certain rituals.

With the New Word Fellowship (NeWF), my hope is to restore an orientation to the central theme of the Hebrew prophets and Jesus, love of the neighbor. Doing so, however, in a manner particularly appropriate for American society as it now exists, and the threat of “global warming.” My hope is that the NeWF has application outside of American society; I recognize, however, that as one who has been associated with American society all of his life, it is inevitable that my ideas would have particular relevance for American society, and might need “translation” to have applicability for other societies.

To return to the matter of “gifts,” I believe that in addition to the “intellectual” gifts that I have discussed above, I have a “natural” tendency to amuse those around me, especially by reacting to situations that develop in a humorous way—i.e., by saying something that brings a smile to those around me, perhaps *saying* it in a way that adds to its humor. Also, in writing I do the same thing, as happened this morning in responding to a Facebook posting by Sufyan:



Sufyan Bin Uzayr

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."

--Maya Angelou

Like · Comment · Share · Wednesday at 8:29am · 🌐



7 people like this.



Prem Pandey that's beautifully put.

Wednesday at 2:53pm · Like



Sufyan Bin Uzayr Prem Aunty: :)

Wednesday at 2:55pm · Like



Al Thompson We ask the "Why?" question too much. Why do we do that? (Ignore this last question!--but I just couldn't help myself.)

20 minutes ago · Like

Not that this is terribly funny, but it illustrates the fact that I like wordplay, and in becoming involved in it often bring a smile to those hearing/reading it.

I can't say, with honesty, that I "do" much for others; if I were to come into a lot of money, I would feel obligated to use most of it to help others less fortunate—and would do so gladly, knowing that doing so would also make *me* happy. Not having much money prevents me from helping others as much as I would like, but I hope that what I say and do in the presence of others not only makes them feel comfortable, but gives them a chuckle—or at least a smile. Not that I make a conscious effort to do so; rather, it simply expresses who I am. Not that I regard myself as a perfect person; but basically, I am content that I'm the sort of person that I am. One might think of a "gentleman" as one who (to draw somewhat from what someone else has written) is polite, courteous, and comfortable enough in his own skin to make others feel comfortable around him. He also has a sense of responsibility to do the right thing, and won't allow himself to be affected by others who either mistreat him, take advantage of him, or try to take advantage of him because of his values. A gentleman is also who does not hesitate to compliment others for good things that (in his opinion) they have done—but does so not to flatter others (hoping that one has made "points" with them, which "points" will help in his future dealings with them), but only out of a sincere sense of appreciation for what they have done that is worthy—in his judgment—of note.

If I don't "do" much for others, at least I would like to think that I am a gentleman—most of the time, at least.

A few days ago I sent the following email to our older daughter, Rebecca (in Stoughton, Massachusetts), along with a few other recipients:

Does anyone see any resemblance?



The only difference I see is that the man in the first picture has less hair and is carrying a pitchfork!

(Sorry, Rebecca and Sunmin, but I just couldn't resist!)

So far I haven't received any response from Rebecca. Perhaps I will *never* receive any more communications from her!

[March 30, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/03/30/lovelocks-limitations/>]

Lovelock's Limitations

Alton C. Thompson

I have referred to British scientist [James Lovelock](#) [1919 -] fairly often in my recently-posted [essays](#) (“Lovelock” appears 22 times)—and always in a positive manner. The latter fact might

suggest that I find no flaws in Lovelock’s thinking, but such is by no means the case. Given this fact, I use the present essay to detail some of my problems with Lovelock. However, I limit my commentary in two ways:



Granddaughter Evelyn in her hanbok.

- I make no comments on “[geophysiology](#)”—i.e., [Gaian](#) science—as a *science*: I am not competent so to do, and am not particularly interested in doing so anyway. (“Gaia,” by the way, is Lovelock’s term for Earth System. He uses Chapter 6—“The History of Gaia Theory,” pp. 159 – 185, in the book cited below)—to describe the development of this theory, including his own role in that development.)

- I limit my commentary to Lovelock’s most recent book, [The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning](#) (2009). (Given that Lovelock will be 93 on July 26, 2012, this may very well be his last book.)

My primary interest in Lovelock’s writings is his projections regarding changes in size of the the world’s population in the future, and the possible implications of those changes. Before commenting on what Lovelock has written on these—and a few other—matters, however, I offer some background to my presentation.

Background

After the “Big Bang” and the appearance of Earth, our planet began to experience physical-chemical changes, at some point primitive forms of life began to appear, and Earth itself emerged as a *system*. As, that is, an entity that somehow developed negative feedback mechanisms whose “working” resulted in the maintenance of relative stability in temperature conditions from an annual standpoint. And as living organisms contributed to the composition of

the atmosphere, Earth System “worked” to maintain that atmosphere with a gaseous composition that not only favored life, but remained rather constant.

At times, in Earth’s history, disturbances have occurred in the form of asteroids striking the Earth or volcanic eruptions, etc., such disturbances moving Earth away from its former state of relative equilibrium. However, the negative feedback mechanisms with which Earth is “equipped” soon went to work to restore the equilibrium that had existed before, and eventually succeeded.

Any system can, however, be stressed to the point that the negative feedback mechanisms that had been “striving” to restore an equilibrium state simply “give up,” and are replaced by positive feedback mechanisms, which “work” to hasten change—“work,” that is, in a manner opposite to negative feedback mechanisms. The system then “dies.”

When humans appeared on the scene, they represented no threat to Earth System. Their way of life, however, dependent as it was for sustenance on gathering, *did* place limitations on their numbers—an upper limit of about 100 million per Lovelock (p. 87). Their later development of agriculture (c 10,000 years ago) enabled the support of a larger (and *settled*) population, but Lovelock offered no estimate on what that larger number might be. (The number would depend on the technology then available.)

The discovery/invention of agriculture was significant not only in enabling the support of a larger population, but in enabling the development of urban centers. This meant not only the development of a more uneven distribution of population, but the development of class/caste social systems—with their associated exploitation of some by others (a phenomenon that has been with us ever since).

A “contribution” that was enabled by the development of such societies was that of *technology*—a type of development that tends to feed upon itself. That is, once an innovation occurs, it is “tested,” analyzed, and improved by increments; but as populations expand, those increments tend to occur closer and closer together.

Still, from the perspective of 2012 it seems clear that the most significant period of technological development began around 1750, centered on England—what has come to be called the “Industrial Revolution.” (I say this despite Lovelock’s assertion, on p. 233, that: “We became the Earth’s infection a long and uncertain time ago when we first used fire and tools purposefully.”) During that period new procedures were invented to produce products, new products themselves came into being, new modes of transport were developed—and new energy sources were developed. Whereas up to this point in history human and animal labor, supplemented with some wind and water power, were dominant, with the Industrial Revolution fossil fuels came into use—for powering machines (for production as well as transportation purposes), for heating structures, etc.

The technological developments associated with the Industrial Revolution, along with the use of fossil fuels (coal first, petroleum later) on a large scale, had two major effects. First, they enabled an explosive growth in the human population. Second, the latter in particular (i.e., the increased use of fossil fuels) resulted in the release of “greenhouse” gases into the atmosphere—gases whose accumulation in the lower atmosphere prevent some of the long-wave heat energy emanating from Earth to escape into the outer atmosphere, thereby heating the lower atmosphere. This additional heat also, however, had other atmospheric effects—such as causing an increase in the number of storms, causing an increase in the number of severe storms, and causing increased variability in atmospheric conditions at any given location. When people use the terms “global warming” and “climate change,” it is these phenomena to which they are referring.

Although our “global warming” today is a result of both increased population *and* increased per capita use of fossil fuels, Lovelock—oddly—sees “too many people” as being the fundamental problem. For example, Lovelock makes the following statements:

- “Merely by existing, people and their dependent animals are responsible for more than ten times the greenhouse gas emissions of all the airline travel in the world.” (p. 5)
- “We try to convince ourselves that if we sufficiently improved our carbon footprint [,] all would be well again and business as usual could continue. In reality [,] increasing the number of people increases the population of livestock and of the area of land [that] we use for ourselves. True enough, the world total of domestic and industrial emissions of 30 gigatons of carbon dioxide annually is far too great, but so are the consequences of too many people, competing for land with the natural resources of the world.” (pp. 102 – 103)
- “Seven billion [humans] living as we do, and aspire to do, is too many for a planet that tried to self-regulate its climate.” (p. 119)
- “. . . Gaia’s illness could be called polyanthroponemia, where humans overpopulate until they do more harm than good.” (p. 119)

Granted that the Earth’s population is “too large” given the greenhouse gases that humans have been generating. But rather than identifying “too many” people as the culprit, it makes more sense to identify *technological development* as the fundamental culprit—because it is *that* development which has led both to excessive population growth *and* our high per capita use (directly and indirectly) of fossil fuels. Lovelock states (p. 154) that: “The great rapidity with which we add carbon gases to the air may be as damaging as the quantity of them”—and I will not dispute that possibility. However, it seems clear that the basic—i.e., the underlying—reason for that “rapidity” is the technological development that has been occurring, and at an accelerated rate since the Industrial Revolution.

Comments on the Book

The principal point that Lovelock wishes to make, though, is that we humans have been producing greenhouse gases to such a degree that the negative feedback mechanisms which have been “fighting” increased warming have met their match, and have “given up” (or soon will)—so that the positive feedback mechanisms now coming into play will cause accelerated heating and the other atmospheric phenomena associated with that heating. Given, e.g., the huge mass of severe storms that affected much of the eastern part of the United States recently, this prediction is all too believable (although not directly traceable to global warming).

Lovelock uses a striking analogy to make his point (p. 85): “Like the skier who accidentally starts an avalanche [which may take his life!], there is little [that] we can do to stop its [i.e., global warming’s] destructive course.” That is, we have not *intended* to bring harm to ourselves by, e.g., driving our automobiles; indeed, we have tended to perceive the many marvels of civilization as *adding* to our comfort and our enjoyment of life. Little did we know that there was a “piper to pay” as a consequence of our actions.

Lovelock points out that we have not noticed the heat that has been building up because much of it (p. 79) “has gone into warming that huge lump of water, the ocean, and into melting ice.” When that “task” is accomplished, however, Earth’s atmosphere is likely to increase quickly. As Lovelock notes (p. 7), “The Earth’s history and simple climate models based on the notion of a live and responsive Earth suggest that sudden change and surprise are . . . likely.” And that (p. 17) “before the climate can return to its pre-industrial state, all [of] the melted ice has to be frozen again, and this means repaying the latent-heat debt of the ice.”

As this rapid heating occurs, Lovelock’s expectation is that many humans will die:

- Earth “is ever more at risk of changing to a barren state in which few of us can survive.” (p. 4)
- “As we hold our meetings and talk of stewardship, Gaia moves step by step toward the hot state, one that will allow her to continue as the regulator, but where few of us will be alive to meet and talk.” (p. 6)
- “The climate war could kill nearly all of us and leave the few survivors living a Stone Age existence.” (p. 33)
- In “a few decades the Earth could cease to be the habitat of [its current] 7 billion humans; it will save itself as it dispatches all but a few of those who now live in what will become the barren regions.” (p. 86)

Each of the above four statements used the word “few,” a word to which it is not easy to attach a numerical value. However, on p. 87 Lovelock makes this statement:

With science and technology present, the numbers [that could be supported by Earth] are imponderable, and we have proved that 7 billion is possible for a short period. But how many will be in balance on an Earth 7 degrees [Fahrenheit] hotter than now? It might be as little as 100 million if the carrying capacity of the land surface of a hot Earth falls to 10 percent of what we have now.

Thus, Lovelock raises the prospect that Earth's population could be reduced to as few as 100 million—i.e., to about *1.4% of what it is now*. **That is a HUGE decrease in population!** In fact, “huge” does not begin to describe the magnitude of the change in Earth's human population (to say nothing of the populations of other species) that may occur during the next few decades as global warming continues apace. [Elsewhere](#), Lovelock has stated his expectation that by the end of this century the world's population will be reduced to about 500 million (i.e., about 7% of what it is at present). But whether the number is 100 million or 500 million (and, of course, it could be *less* than 100 million), if Lovelock's reasoning is correct—and I have no reason to doubt him, given his knowledge of systems—the implication is that we humans are in serious trouble—but one would never know that fact from reading a newspaper or popular magazine, or watching television. This is strange, but true! Did I say strange? I should say *incomprehensible*, impossible to believe! But true nonetheless!

I wish now to make several comments on Lovelock's books that go beyond the comments that I have already made, comments that go to the “heart” of my problems with Lovelock's book:

- Lovelock provides us with no detailed scenario of the changes that are likely to occur between now and, say, 2100 CE. Granted that it is impossible to know the future in any detail, but it *is* possible to make reasonable guesses—and Lovelock fails to do so. I assume that the reason for this is that his background is in physics, geology, and biology rather than any of the “social sciences.” But despite his excuses(s) for not providing us with some sort of scenario, that lack impacts some of the points that he makes in the book—in that it renders them somewhat pointless or “wrongheaded,” as I will be commenting on shortly.
- In reading some parts of the book I am reminded of presidential candidate Mitt Romney—who in speaking before one group will state a certain position, but in addressing a different group will say something quite different—and when questioned about his inconsistencies, denies that he has contradicted himself. Also, as a former reader of the Hågar the Horrible cartoon, I remember one in which a friend of Hågar is listing the qualities that he would like to have in a wife, and Hågar responds—likely with *his* wife Helga in mind!—“Make up your mind!” Suggesting thereby that the friend will *never* find a woman with all of those traits, for they are mutually contradictory.

The reason that Romney and Hågar both remind me of Lovelock is that he is inconsistent in expressing a view regarding whether global warming is reversible—something that my

discussion so far does not suggest, but is in fact true. His general position seems to be that change is inevitable, and that (p. 85) “I greatly doubt that we have the wisdom or intelligence to reverse it [i.e., “climate change”].” And even if we were not lacking in wisdom and intelligence, the (p. 74) “Earth system could already be committed to irreversible change”

However, at another point (p. 123) he states: “Whether or not we can reverse the climate change now happening depends on how fast we can do it”—suggesting that reversal *is* possible. Indeed, he adds (p. 89) that “one or more of the several proposals to geoengineer the Earth and stop global heating might work, or some natural event such as a series of giant volcanic eruptions might intervene, or the models that predict the climate are even more wrong than I thought they were.” Given the possibility that we could be “saved” after all, we need (p. 11) “to act now” We need (p. 13) “to respond more like the inhabitants of a city threatened by a flood.” That is, we need to respond—and quickly—because there *is* a chance that we can save ourselves after all.

Lovelock goes so far, in fact, as to assert (p. 245) that “surely the future is full of promise.” And even though many may be culled by global warming in the coming years, our species will not (p. 81) become extinct. And (p. 93): “For the young [in the future], life will be full of opportunities to serve, to create, and they will have a purpose for living.” However, (p. 23): “Our proper responses and actions to prevent, or more likely escape[,] the worst [effects of global warming], . . . require that science embraces this concept [of Gaia,] and abandons the sterile ideas of mainstream Earth and life science.” Thus, “salvation”—for some, at least,—is possible—assuming that is, that we begin to embrace the idea of Gaia. On the other hand, however (p. 233): “There may be nothing [that] we can do to stop the adverse changes now in progress; we cannot reduce our numbers fast enough[,] and there is only a small chance that, using the remedies of Chapter 5 [“Geoengineering”], we could reverse climate change.”

Lovelock keeps going back in forth on whether global warming can be reversed or not. His basic position seems to be that further changes are coming, and these are likely to have drastic consequences—resulting in a severe culling of the human population. The fact that he devotes an entire chapter (Chapter 5) to a discussion of geoengineering, however, suggests that he believes that global warming *can* be countered—but he then admits that “there is only a small chance” that those remedies would work. He could have added that the leadership that exists in the United States and elsewhere seems so oblivious to the threats posed by global warming that it is highly unlikely that geoengineering efforts will even be *tried*!

- I noted above that Lovelock’s failure to provide us with any sort of scenario of the changes occurring between now and, e.g., the end of this century “impacts some of the

points that he makes in the book—in that it renders them somewhat pointless or ‘wrongheaded,’ . . . ” and even potentially *dangerous*, I would now add. To illustrate what I mean in making those claims, I need to *have* some sort of scenario, of course, and therefore will need to *provide* one here, and then use it to support my claims, as stated above. Let me begin this section, then, by presenting a brief such scenario—one having just enough detail to enable me to call some of Lovelock’s statements/suggestions into question:

As global warming proceeds, it will, of course, affect some individuals more than others in the early years; but as I wish to use a *societal*, rather than an *individual*, perspective here, the first point that I would make is that global warming would cause disruptions in the economy. Some producers of necessities (food, most notably) would find that their products were damaged (directly or indirectly) by global warming, thereby lessening the quantity of their items on the market—and increasing the prices for those items. Initially, the amount of damage, and resulting price increases, might be minimal enough that people could substitute one item for another, and still survive comfortably. However, as the amount of damage—both in terms of number of items affected, and damage to a given item—increases, food shortages will develop, and people will begin to acquire necessities by theft—using violence if necessary—rather than purchase. Indeed, a point will be reached where economies begin to collapse—meaning that the production of many items will cease, and the transportation of items from one place to another will also cease. When *this* occurs, people will begin “dying like flies” as a result of starvation, disease, and violence—to say nothing of premature deaths resulting from excessive heat, storms, floods, fires, etc.

As a crisis develops, governments can be expected to step in to respond. But as governments begin to lose their personnel because of global warming and otherwise lose their ability to act, they will also break down—leaving behind a situation of utter chaos. People will start wandering around, abandoning the cities, in search of food, so that even those who have anticipated the consequences of global warming, have moved to a “safe” location, and have attempted to engage in adaptive behaviors may find desperate people at their doors—and faced with the question: “Should I try to help these people, or should I shoot them so that at least I and the members of my family have a chance to survive.” A difficult choice—one that I hope that I am never faced with (unlikely because of my age, but I have four grandchildren, and hope that they are not faced with such a dilemma).

Even if the population of the United States is reduced by “only” 80% by 2100 CE, such a reduction likely would result in the utter disintegration of our society. And if Lovelock turns out to be correct in his projection that the world’s population will be but 7% of what it is now (or 1.4% by the time that the heating has run its course), only a madman would

think that a functioning society would exist in the United States when 2100 CE arrives. Yet, the question arises: Does Lovelock qualify as such a person? Let us look at some of his statements about the future, and try to make a reasonable judgment on the matter:

Lovelock makes a number of references to “leadership.” On p. 95 he asserts: “Orderly survival requires an unusual degree of human understanding and leadership . . . ;” and on the same page refers to “a leader whose rhetoric would fire the nation” On p. 32 he states: “We need a leader who will stir us all” On p. 25 he declares that “our leaders should immediately concentrate their minds on sustaining their own nations” In his references to “leadership” he neglects to recognize that our leaders (in the United States, at any rate) are mere puppets of wealthy individuals (such as the Koch brothers) and rich corporations, neither of which has evinced any interest beyond next quarter’s “bottom line.” Such “leadership” is not what we *need*, but is what we have; and if or when these “leaders” finally recognize that global warming is a serious threat, it’s likely that our society will be in the process of disintegrating. *That* fact implies that conditions will be too chaotic for there to be any followers, which fact means, in turn that there will *be* no leaders—for without followers, there can be no leaders. Besides, so many potential followers in our society are so preoccupied with their jobs and/or with diversions (sports, television, movies, the bar scene, etc.) that a potential leader would have difficulty recruiting followers.

On p. 78 Lovelock states: “We need . . . to sustain the infrastructure of the cities, the housing, health, and other services, including schools, waste disposal, and transport.” On p. 27 he declares: “For us to survive as a civilized nation, our cities need . . . [a] safe, secure, and constant supply of electricity” And on p. 25 states: “Huge flows of electricity will be demanded by the mega-cities that are starting to emerge” These statements cause one to ask: Given that severe population culling is likely to occur, and that associated with that culling will be chaotic conditions—with cities losing population both through premature deaths and out-migration—what would be the point in, e.g., trying to maintain infrastructure (for *whom?*); and *who* would be left to do it anyway?

On p. 33 he states that we need to make “our countries self-sufficient in food and energy” But if a country now imports much of their food, and supplies become cut off, will it be able to become “self-sufficient”? On the one hand, it may lack enough arable land to make this possible; and on the other hand, if the country is in a state of chaos—which is highly likely—there will be no “control system” in place that would enable this to occur.

Lovelock claims (p. 17): “The British Isles and New Zealand will be among the least affected by global warming.” And because of this: “They will be among the lifeboats for humanity.” That is, they will be countries to which people will wish to migrate for

“safety.” However, on p. 92 he admits that island countries such as Britain, “although among the few areas of the world least threatened by global warming, are at the same time among the least well supplied with food and energy.” Given this lack, how will the inhabitants of Britain be able to support themselves?! And why would residents of a non-safe area (such as the Netherlands, threatened as it will be by rising sea level) choose to migrate to a country that can offer them only a “good climate, considering”? In fact, wouldn’t it make sense for people in *Britain* to start thinking about moving, to Australia, for example (if the Australians will let them in!)?

At various places in the book Lovelock touts nuclear energy. For example, on p. 25 he notes that as supplies of coal, gas, and oil decline, this leaves us with “no alternative” but to develop nuclear energy. What this assumes, however, is that cities—large ones at that—will continue exist to (and here I thought that he kept saying that the world’s population would be severely culled!). And if the prospect is, indeed, for that severe culling, who would be *using* that nuclear-generated energy? And who will *tend* the generating plants when our population is reduced to but a fraction of what it is now? In fact, wouldn’t the existence of those idle plants be a *hazard* to those living then—so why would you want to make their continued survival even less likely?!

- Lovelock makes a number of references to our need to “adapt”—and even asserts (p. 157) that we *can* adapt: “We can adapt to climate change, and this will allow us to make the best use of the refuge areas of the world that escape the worst heat and drought.” In addition he says that (p. 30) “our world has changed forever, and we will have to adapt, and to more than climate change.” “Until [p. 68] we know for certain how to cure global warming [so we *can* cure it, then?!], our greatest efforts should go into adaptation, to preparing those parts of the Earth least likely to be affected by adverse climate change as the safe havens for a civilized humanity.” My (p. 75) “plea is that adaptation is made at least equal in importance to policy-driven attempts to reduce emissions.” We need (p. 76) “to prepare for failure [in developing, and deploying, global *cooling* techniques] by adaptation.”

It is certainly reasonable to argue that we need to begin thinking seriously about adaptation, given the changes that will inevitably be occurring as a result of global warming. But should *governments* take the leadership role in doing this, as Lovelock implies? (Better, *will* they?!) And *if* they should, *what* should they do? Should they try to develop alternate sources of energy, or what? Lovelock is ambiguous as to just what “adaptation” should encompass. He specifies that adaptational efforts should occur in “safe havens,” but admits (pp. 77 – 78) that: “Even in the survival havens where climate change is gentle enough to allow the continued growth of food there will be disasters and difficulties.” On p. 92 he declares: “Not only must we survive but also we must stay civilized.” But this raises the questions: *What* of civilization should we attempt to retain,

what discard—given that we *can't* retain everything, and much is not *worth* retaining anyway? And: Is it not the *survivors*—and *only* them—who will be around to answer this question, and will they not answer that question in a manner that is meaningful to *them*?

- Lovelock makes a number of references to “natural selection,” a concept associated especially with Charles Darwin [1809 – 1882] (see my [partially-finished work](#) on Darwin for my views on Darwin). He does not, however, seem to understand how Darwin defined the concept; nor does he understand that “natural selection” played little, if any, role in human history (rather, environmental change brought our ancestors out of the trees, the presence of predators gave a survival advantage to those who lived in groups, and female-choice sexual selection tended to yield individuals with a genetic proclivity for cooperative behavior). Nor does Lovelock seem to comprehend that Darwin’s concept of “natural selection”—an invented concept, rather than one with firm empirical support—gave rise to the evil of [Social Darwinism](#).

We are *not*, contrary to Lovelock’s claim (p. 9), “creatures of Darwinian evolution” The claim (p. 246) that “we are what our genes make us” ignores the fact that the nature of one’s upbringing, and the environment (social especially) that one lives in plays a huge role in “making” a person—and that, additionally, to an important degree we can *choose* what we are like. In stating (p. 14) that there has been “nothing unnatural about . . . our evolution” Lovelock ignores the Discrepancy concept (see my [eBook](#), Chapters 2 - 4), to which I will be making reference shortly). He makes reference (p. 231) to the possibility of changing our genes, under the naïve assumption that it is our genes that determine what we are. His assertion (p. 125) that “anything we make is natural,” in conjunction with his assertion (p. 233) that we became an “infection of the Earth” with our first use of fire, ignores the role that the Discrepancy has played in human history (since the Agricultural Revolution)—this despite the fact that he recognizes that (p. 80) “We are perfectly evolved to live as hunter-gatherers.”

- The final comment that I will make is that Lovelock’s vision is extremely limited in that his preoccupation is with global warming. I, in contrast, recognize that many problems exist at present in addition to global warming, including inequality, unemployment and underemployment, poverty, exploitation, crime, corruption, military adventurism and the senseless killing associated with it, drug abuse, spousal abuse, child abuse, boring jobs, disease, greed, selfishness, the fact that our democracy exists in name only, etc.

My view is that all of our problems today are ultimately rooted in the Discrepancy that started to develop about 10,000 years ago—with the Agricultural Revolution. Up to that point in time there had been a co-development of humans as biological entities and their gatherer, then gatherer-hunter, way of life—meaning that humans had become

“designed” for that way of life, and the way of life itself had “guided” our development as biological beings.

With the Agricultural Revolution, ways of life began to change, but human biology has changed but little over the past 10,000 years. Put another way, a Discrepancy has arisen between the way of life for which we had become “*designed*” and the ways of life that we began to *live*—were *forced* to live, in most cases. As a consequence, we are no longer exposed (as a matter of course) to the stimuli for which we had become designed; we are no longer able (as a matter of course) to engage in the activities for which we had become designed; and we are no longer able (as a matter of course) to use our brains in the manner for which they had become designed. (One way of putting the latter is that our brains are designed for “[idiographic](#)” thinking but our modern world imposes “nomothetic” thinking on us.)

Although little firm empirical research exists to support this view (not surprising, given that most research tends to be highly conventional in nature, and thereby supportive of the *status quo*), I would hypothesize that virtually *all* of the problems that humans have encountered through history have their basis in this Discrepancy, which began to develop about 10,000 years ago. Indeed, not only do I *hypothesize* this, I *believe* it. Because of that fact, it seems obvious to me that to address the problem of global warming—and all other problems besides—we must attempt to “restore” a way of life that accords with our “design specifications” as humans. While doing so, however, we must recognize the threat posed by global warming, and recognize that our only option now, as humans, is to try to *adapt*, as best we can, to the changes that will be incident on the “progress” of global warming. Furthermore, I believe that only a fool would look to government for leadership, and that the answer lies in individuals, acting either as individuals or as members of groups formed for the purpose of engaging in adaptational efforts, to develop ideas regarding adaptation, then plans—and to then act on those plans.

I, for one, intend to spend the rest of my life thinking about adaptation, and doing what I can to act on those ideas. As for Lovelock, he will soon be 93 (on July 26, 2012), and does not need to give this matter serious thought—although he should, as he has four children. However, Lovelock is handicapped in that regard because his academic interests do not prepare him for thinking about adaptation.

Conclusions

Lovelock’s warning that global warming is likely to cull most of the world’s population by the end of this century, based, as it is, on a *systems* view of Earth, should be taken seriously (although few do). However, when Lovelock ventures beyond the confines of Gaian science, he too often expresses views that are incomplete (e.g., he fails to provide a

scenario of the likely changes between now and 2100 CE), contradictory (e.g., whether or not it's possible to halt global warming), or even ignorant (e.g., the unwarranted homage he pays to Charles Darwin).

Most seriously, however, although he drops hints that he is aware of the Discrepancy concept, with its associated concept of human “design specifications” (e.g., in acknowledging that humans are “fitted” for a gatherer-hunter existence), the fact of the matter is that he is not. As a consequence, he is unable to comprehend the possibility that not only is global warming rooted in the Discrepancy, but so are virtually all of our other problems as well. Given *that*, the solution to those problems—including global warming—is not only to engage in adaptive activities, but simultaneously to engage in efforts that give due attention to *what* our design specifications are (a matter of varying views, as I point out in my eBook), along with what *procedure* (e.g., use of the Structured Interaction Group) is best used, both to adapt and to achieve a way of life that accords with our design specifications. These are points that Lovelock not only does *not* comprehend, but is apparently *unable* to comprehend.

[April 3, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/03/a-farewell-to-easter/>

A Farewell to Easter

Alton C. Thompson

With Easter but a few days off (it's on April 8, 2012, this year), I am reminded by this statement by Paul Ryan a few days ago:

[When government provides people with assistance, it] "lulls able-bodied people into lives of complacency and dependency, which drains them of their very will and incentive to make the most of their lives. It's demeaning."³⁶

Given that "Ryan" is an Irish name, one might suspect that this Mr. Ryan was referring to British royalty—who, after all, live on "welfare." However, it turns out that the Ryan in question "represents" the district³⁷ in which I live (here in Wisconsin) in the U. S. House of Representatives, and his reference was to needy people who, e.g., lack jobs for one reason or another, and are being helped to survive by the national government.

The fact that Ryan—referred to by Nobel-prize-winning economist Paul [Krugman](#) as "[The Flimflam Man](#)"—is being touted—e.g., by presidential candidate Willard ("Mitt") Romney as an intellectual giant, but has made claims about people in desperate straits that smack of colossal ignorance, in itself warrants comment here. But that will need to wait for another essay, as the point that I wish to make here is that Ryan is an avowed Christian, but with views that are in *direct conflict* with the putative founder of his religion. For did not [Jesus say](#) that what marked one as a follower of him was that one gave food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, was welcoming to strangers, gave clothes to those in need of clothes, visited the sick, and visited those in prison?

What people like Paul Ryan—and there are many like him in our society³⁸—illustrate is that although the initial followers of Jesus evidently attempted (but in various ways, however) to

³⁶ Joel McNally, "Scrooge McRyan," *Shepherd Express*, March 29, 2012, p. 12. Ryan's statement was made during a meeting of the (right-wing) American Enterprise Institute.

³⁷ By no means does he represent *me*! He has never received *my* vote! Ryan has received some support for [Archbishop Timothy Dolan](#), who has been soundly criticized by theologian [Daniel C. Maguire](#) of Marquette University (a Jesuit university) here in Milwaukee.

³⁸ A sad commentary on the state of Christianity in this country!

continue the religion of Jesus,³⁹ over time—and especially after Emperor (and “saint”!) [Constantine](#). [272 – 337]—Christianity became, increasingly, a religion (if one can call it that!) merely *about* Jesus, with but scant interest in what Jesus may have *taught*. In addition, the days to be celebrated by Christians came to be days that had nothing whatsoever to with Jesus’s “ministry,” focusing instead on *events* in his life—his birth (“Christmas”), his crucifixion (“Good Friday”), and his alleged resurrection (“Easter”).

Although the “about” view of Christianity dominates over the “of” view, *both* views have in common that they assume that Jesus was a historical character. But *scholars* on both sides of this divide are faced with another group of scholars whose goal has been to *question* the historicity of Jesus.⁴⁰ Thus, although those in the latter group deny the claim that Jesus, after being dead a few days, came back to life (i.e., was “resurrected”), those whose Christianity is of an “about” variety share with those of the “of” variety the claim of Jesus’s resurrection.

However, for anyone living in this Age of Science who is not a hypocrite, it is impossible to believe this. And for those of us who do *not* accept this claim, a question that may be of interest to us is: How, then, did this belief arise in the first place?

I have long believed that this concept entered Christianity by way of the [Mystery religions](#) that were popular in the Mediterranean Basin in Jesus’s time—the thesis that “gentile” converts who became associated with the new religion (through the efforts of Paul of Tarsus, e.g.), being themselves familiar with one or more Mysteries, brought the idea into Christianity. I have recognized, however, that the problem with this thesis is that whereas in the Mysteries the god died in the autumn and revived again in the spring (for these religions tended to be vegetation-based), with Christianity the birth (of Jesus) was said to have occurred during the “dead” (!) of winter (rather than in the autumn), with the death occurring in the spring, followed a few days later by a sort of rebirth (i.e., the resurrection).

Because of that “disconnect” between Christianity and the Mysteries, I sent an email to Bart D. Ehrman at my *alma mater* (the University of North Carolina), and asked him for his opinion. His reply (dated March 12, 2012): “I don’t think pagan fertility cults really had much of anything to do with ideas of Jesus’[‘] resurrection. I talk about this a bit in a book coming out next week, called *Did Jesus Exist* [cited in endnote 5 below]. Specifically, I think [that] the

³⁹ Which *was*, after all, simply that set of principles drawn from the Scriptures of which he was aware that will resonate with *anyone* who is in touch with one’s true nature as a human being. More on this later.

⁴⁰ Bart D. Ehrman’s *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (2012) is a recent example. Although himself an agnostic, Ehrman argues in this book that Jesus was a historical character, and analyzes critically the arguments of those scholars and others who have argued otherwise.

disciples were already Jewish apocalypticists who subscribed to the idea of ‘resurrection’ (unlike pagans); my guess is that soon after Jesus’[s] death (a week or two later?) one or more of his disciples had a vision (or dream interpreted as a vision?) of Jesus (much as my grandfather ‘saw’ my grandmother a couple of weeks after her funeral) and interpreted that as meaning that Jesus was still alive. And still alive, for a Jewish apocalypticist, meant raised from the dead. So the resurrection has started, and will be completed soon. Maybe next week.”

I appreciated this quick response from Prof. Ehrman (a true “Carolina gentleman”!), and found his version of events highly plausible—so that I have since abandoned my belief in a Mystery religion connection.

As a NeWFian, however, I would go beyond Prof. Ehrman’s thesis, and argue that we should view the story of Jesus’s resurrection not simply as a story, but as a story that can have *symbolic* significance for us moderns. This is important, for if elements of the Bible don’t have any *significance* for us, why should we have any *interest* in them?! And the significance that we should look for in the Bible is *principles for living*, not historical “facts.”

The significance that *I* perceive in the story of Jesus’s resurrection is that I see a link between that story and the story about [John the Baptizer](#). When John baptized someone in the river Jordan, going into the water (by the person to be baptized) could be thought of as accomplishing a washing away of one’s sins, thereby “saving” one from debilitating feelings of guilt; and the immersion then performed by John could be thought of as a (feigned) drowning, symbolizing to all of those observing the event that the one being baptized was “killing” his/her old “sinful” self, thereby enabling the person to live as one should (e.g., in accord with the Matthew 25 passage referred to above).⁴¹ What may have *contributed* (as a motivational factor) to the creation of the idea that Jesus was resurrected (beyond Prof. Ehrman’s scenario) was the perception of Jesus’s alleged resurrection as on the one hand related to John’s earlier “ministry” and, on the other hand, providing a “model” of what one can achieve: We, too, can “die” to our past, with whatever ugliness it contains, and become new people—i.e., become “born again.”⁴²

Indeed, I would go beyond my suggestion that we interpret various Biblical passages symbolically, and note that the [NeWFian](#) (including one, such as myself, who was raised in Christianity) might very well ask: Does it really *matter* if Jesus ever really existed or not?

⁴¹ The NeWFian would add that subjecting oneself to this ritual would not be enough. In addition, it would help tremendously if one had been raised properly (see my “[Is Capitalism Inherently Evil?](#)”), participated on a regular basis in a New Word Fellowship (NeWF) (see my “[Worship](#)”), were able to interact on a regular basis with others who shared one’s values, etc.

⁴² In [John 3:3](#) Jesus is quoted as telling Nicodemus: ““Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

Indeed, cannot I regard the Christian Bible as somewhat like a work of *fiction*? After all, do not works of fiction often contain a great deal of wisdom (the plays of [William Shakespeare](#) [1564 – 1616] come to mind), and is it not *wisdom* that NeWFians and other religious people should seek, not *facts*? Is it not principles for living that one expects to find in a religious book, not factually true statements?

That was the perspective that guided me in writing Chapter 1 of [What Are Churches For?](#)—although I did not make that fact explicit in that eBook. In that chapter I give an overview of the Bible from my perspective as one who, as a “NeWFian Restorationist,” emphasizes the importance of the Discrepancy concept and that of “human design specifications” (see chapters 2 – 4 in the eBook). That is, in my overview I focused on just those elements in the Bible that conveyed *wisdom* and ideas for how one should live, with the individuals I named being more like “characters” in a novel than historical persons whose historicity could be independently verified.

My focus was on ideas associated with “characters” who, in my judgment, had reacted to the Discrepancy (that began to occur about 10,000 years ago) in a negative manner, and did what they could to restore their fellows to a situation of accord between their way of life and their “design specifications as humans.” Specifications that had arisen through an evolutionary process—but decidedly *not* one that involved Darwinian “natural selection. (See my “[Obstacles to the Good Society](#)” for a discussion of the factors that *did*, rather, play a role in human evolution. For a fuller discussion of my views regarding Darwin, see my partially-completed [eBook](#).)

Although in my *What Are Churches For?* (Chapter 1) I may give the *impression* that I regard the Bible as an “inerrant” record of factual data, in actuality I was reading it as I would a novel, and identifying passages that “spoke” to me. As I at least *suggested* in that eBook, on the one hand I perceive virtually all of our contemporary problems as being rooted in the Discrepancy—but also argue that ancient Hebrew religion acquired (in the “novel” concerned) its ethical component as a result of certain “sensitive ones” sensing that problems *then* were the result of the Discrepancy, which then motivated them to do what they could to reduce the Discrepancy. Not that I grant *no* historical value to the Bible—that’s not the point I wish to make here. Rather, I found it *useful* to regard the Bible as novel-like in my discussion of it (which is why scholars might very well question some of my statements in that chapter).

Not only, per my perspective, did the Discrepancy help give ancient Hebrew religion its ethical component; it has also, I believe, been the motivation behind “utopian” thinking over the centuries, as well as reform efforts down to the present—including my efforts not only to create a new religion (NeWFism), but to “save” humankind from global warming—insofar as that’s possible. (As my recent “[Lovelock’s Limitations](#)” suggests, that is likely to be only *partially* possible—if at all.)

[March 4, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/04/big-history-big-mistake/>]

Big History, Big Mistake

Alton C. Thompson

In my recent “[Lovelock’s Limitations](#)” I criticized British scientist James Lovelock for predicting that global warming would result in a severe culling of the world’s population, but failing to provide a scenario that would identify the changes likely to occur between now and, e.g., 2100 CE. But Lovelock is not the only scholar interested in global warming whose thinking is flawed. Among those in this category is David Christian.

Christian is associated with the “Big History” movement. In fact, Christian—a professor of History at Australia’s Macquarie University—can be regarded as the “father” of that movement, having published the first [textbook](#) on the subject in 2004.

Recently, Christian wrote a brief article—“[Big History for the Era of Climate Change](#),”—for *Solutions Journal*, and I will confine my comments here to some his statements in that article.

Unlike Lovelock, who is somewhat of a maverick among climate scientists, Christian is content to limit himself to a more “mainstream” viewpoint, evident in his reference—in his first paragraph—to the 2011 [Durban climate change conference](#). He states that “the chances of limiting global warming over the next century to an increased 2 degrees Celsius are vanishing fast.” In stating this, however, he doesn’t seem to realize that some scientists—such as Lovelock—would argue that we have *already* passed the critical point regarding climate change. Nor does he seem to recognize that “global warming” involves not only a warming trend *per se*, but (1) increased storminess, (2) an increase in the number of severe storms, and (3) increased variability (spatial and temporal) in atmospheric conditions.

He refers to “effective international action,” suggesting that (1) governments *must* take the lead in addressing this problem, (2) governments *will* do so, (3) international agreements *can* be reached (and *will* be), and (4) that the actions to be engaged in will—and should—focus on efforts to *halt* global warming’s “progress.” However,

1. Governments, controlled as most are, by elites having a fixation on short-run profits, are *unlikely* to provide the necessary leadership.
2. It’s unlikely that meaningful international agreements will be reached—and then acted upon.

3. Given that it's unlikely that "global warming" *can* be halted, the only option that we humans have is that of *adaptation*. And given point 1, *that* will occur only by *individuals* taking the initiative.

Christian sees "ignorance" as a primary obstacle to success in addressing the global warming problem. Not "enough people have enough understanding of the [relevant] science to see through [the] bad arguments" [out there against global warming that are all too common]. What's needed, however, is not more "science education," but the development of "a global perspective[,] and also a sense of how the environment changes at different time scales."

But *who* should be engaging in this intellectual enterprise? Our leaders? (They won't do it.) The educated populace? (More are, as Christian notes, but will enough do so—and soon—to make any difference? And *will* it anyway?)

Unsurprisingly, Christian promotes "a new approach to education known as 'big history.'" Education in Big History, he says, will help those studying it to develop a Big Picture, and doing so will "empower students intellectually by giving them an overview within which they can situate themselves, their home communities, and everything they know."

As, specifically, to a problem such as global warming, "Big history courses will be particularly valuable in informing students about the global challenges that the planet faces." Perhaps. But how, specifically, will being "well-informed" be *helpful*? And why the emphasis on *learning* over *creativity*? If our only option now is *adaptation*, how will Big History learning help with that process? It should be obvious that determining *how* to adapt is a matter that has no obvious answer—no answer that can simply be extracted from one's "learning." What that adaptation requires is the use of creativity. Granted that knowledge forms the *basis* upon which creativity acts, but creativity—by its very nature—goes *beyond* knowledge; and it is unclear how Big History knowledge will provide a knowledge basis useful for creativity.

Christian seems to be an academic who tacitly assumes that universities will always exist, and there will always be a university within which he can "hold forth." He seems to assume—again tacitly—that Australian society will continue on its merry way while global warming is occurring, and apparently is unable to conceive the possibility—the *likelihood*, in fact—that Australian society will *collapse* within a few decades. In part because he has had nothing to offer so far as adaptation is concerned!

My hope is that the people whom he fools into thinking that he has something important to offer are few in number—for their own sakes!

The World of Beliefs

Alton C. Thompson

Two kinds (i.e., “classes”!) of classification can be identified, classification from above (or logical division) and classification from below (or grouping). With the first type one begins with a given kind of thing (or attribute), and then identify categories of that thing. For example, if the kind of thing in question is “nationality,” categories such as “Irish,” “Indian,” “Finnish,” etc. might be identified. If the “thing” in question is an attribute such as “color,” categories such as “red,” green, “lavender,” mauve,” etc. might be identified. Note that the *nominal* measurement scale is typically involved in identifying categories with logical division.

With grouping classifications, in contrast, one’s starting point is a collection of individual units of some given type—whether people, houses, shopping centers, etc. One then selects some given variable—one that can be measured on a continuous scale (e.g., ratio, interval, percent, etc.)—and then determines for each individual (or a sample of same) its numerical “value” on that variable. One can then either “feed” these numbers into a grouping program (univariate) or—more typically—do the same for a series of other variables, and then feed the resulting numbers into a grouping program (multivariate). In either case the grouping program will identify “natural” groups/categories, with these groups, however, varying in their degree of internal “closeness.” That is, with some groups the individual members will be similar one to another to a very high degree, but with other groups the degree of similarity will vary.⁴³ In fact, if one wishes, one can take a given category identified by the grouping program and subject *its* members to a grouping program—thereby identifying subgroups.

Although the groups that one thereby identifies can be considered “natural” groups, this conclusion must be qualified with the statement that the groups identified by a grouping program are dependent on (1) the particular grouping program used and (2) the particular variables for which measurements were taken. (I assume that for a given variable the “highest” form of measurement had been used.)

⁴³ Imagine here that one has “standardized” the various variables (to make their values comparable), and has created for each individual a *profile*. What the grouping program does is to compare each profile with each other profile on the basis of *similarity* (a concept that is different from that of *correlation*)—which similarity values can then be displayed (if one so wishes) in a $n \times n$ similarity matrix. What the grouping program then does is to “find” those individuals that are most similar, and places them into a group.

Both sorts of classification are useful. Thus, it is important to be aware of both types, so that in a given context one will use that classification procedure most relevant for one's objectives. Often, though, a logical division—which is an intellectual exercise, rather than one involving the use of a computer—will occur to one with no *conscious* purpose in mind, and it is only after one has created the logical division that it occurs to one *how* to use the classification. What this illustrates is that one's subconscious is always “working” *for* us, even though we are not aware of that fact. This recently happened to me, as I found myself creating the following logical division for no apparent reason⁴⁴:

- I. Claimed, but not actual, beliefs
- II. Actual beliefs
 - A. With firm empirical support
 - B. Lacking firm empirical support
 - 1. Held tentatively
 - 2. Held firmly
 - a. Able to provide (ostensible) rationale for belief
 - 1) Makes one appear creative
 - 2) Serves one's interests
 - 3) Is widely accepted in one's group
 - b. Unable to provide rationale for belief
 - 1) Makes one appear intelligent/knowledgeable
 - 2) Has investment in belief (self-image)

This is a logical division that makes sense to me at the moment, but I regard it as a tentative one in that I will not be surprised if I make adjustments in it, from time to time, in the future—even to the point of discarding it. I was apparently “given” the classification at this time because it

⁴⁴ I had just read David Christian's “[Big History for the Era of Climate Change](#),” and therefore assume that my reading of that article caused my subconscious to start thinking about beliefs, and how to classify them. The fact that I am writing this during a period of political campaigning also likely was a contributing factor.

“fits” my interests and concerns at present, and as those change over time, I suspect that I will change the above classification as well.

Of what *use* is this classification? For one thing, it helps define for me the sorts of people with which I might want to interact:

II.A. individuals - because I likely would be in agreement with virtually everything that individuals in that category had to say—if we shared similar interests. If we didn’t share common interests, we might be able to *find* some common ground.

II.B.1. individuals – because I might be able to have a cordial conversation with individuals in that category, and might even be able to “convert” them to my way of thinking.

II.B.2.b. individuals – because if I approached people in this category in a non-combative manner, I might be able to have an intelligent conversation with them, and even convert them to my way of thinking. If, however, a person has an investment in his/her beliefs, I should avoid questioning those beliefs, realizing that the “love the neighbor” command should take precedence in one’s interactions with others. Thus, I should avoid discussing matters sensitive to the other, “back off” if I hit a sensitive spot, and divert the discussion to a topic less likely to be controversial.

One rarely has complete control over those with whom one interacts, and in my case the people with whom I interact tend to be especially in the II.B.2.b. category—which means that I rarely am able to interact with people with whom I enjoy interacting. I try, however, to “make the most” of those interactions, trying to use the “love the neighbor” principle⁴⁵ as the basis for my conversations with others rather than shared interests.

A useful fact to keep in mind as one interacts with others is that individuals differ greatly in the *sources* that they use to formulate their beliefs. Some rely especially on their own direct observations. Some look to an authority figure—such as a priest. Some get their information from newspapers, television, advertisements, commentators, etc. Some rely on research studies reported in journals or books, or presented on internet sites. The reliability of these sources varies greatly, of course, and the fact of these varied sources represents a major roadblock in communication with others—because each party has used sources that s/he trusts.

The above classification also enables me to “place” others with whom I have contact through my reading, television-watching, etc. Thus, I am able to put people such as Rush Limbaugh and most politicians in category I, people who adhere to *laissez-faire* “theory in category II.B.2.b.1), etc. That is, the classification enables me to place some order on the “intellectual” world that I inhabit—and others may find it helpful as well. And if it doesn’t, it may at least motivate others

⁴⁵ Doing so by trying to inject humor into my conversations with others.

to develop their own logical divisions—and if this occurs, please share your classification with me (A.Thompson@Astronautics.com).

A grouping sort of classification of beliefs would also, of course, be of interest, but that sort of classification—unlike the logical division variety—is not an “armchair” sort of classification. It is a sort that would take the time and resources to undertake empirical research, and then access to a computer to “run” a grouping program. But if any reader ever engages in this sort of research—or is aware of research that has already been done of this sort (relating to beliefs)—please let me know about it.

[April 9, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/09/obama-social-darwinism/>]

Obama and Social Darwinism

Alton C. Thompson

For a recent article ([“What Does Social Darwinism Mean to \[President Barack\] Obama?”](#)), the anonymous author asked a Kathleen Hall Jamieson for clarification of “Social Darwinism”:

She says most people are familiar with Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution by natural selection—survival of the fittest. But Jamieson, a political communication authority at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Center, explains that social Darwinism is a concept, an extension of Darwinism, that essentially says that those who are innately superior, often biologically superior, are advantaged in the conflict among or between groups.

She doesn't think that is what Obama is suggesting when he uses the term. Instead, what he is probably trying to convey is that he thinks Republicans subscribe to a theory that each person is on his own—no help from others, no government help.

Implicit in Jamieson's comment is recognition that when a scientific theory is “translated” into a (human) social context, that translation will not be perfect—because it *cannot* be. Why not? Because the phenomenon that the scientific theory (purportedly) explains will be different in nature from the phenomenon purportedly explained by the translated theory. The scientific theory *suggests* some applicability in the (human) social realm to certain individuals, who then perform a “translation” of the scientific theory—with, e.g., “Darwinian natural selection” becoming “Social Darwinism.”

The problem with any such translation, of course, is that there is a high likelihood of misunderstanding. On the one hand, the scientific theory may be misunderstood by the one doing the translating, and on the other hand that person's translation itself may be misunderstood.

But does Jamieson understand the issues involved here? First, does she understand Darwin's theory? Apparently not:

- “Natural selection” is not properly termed a “theory.” A theory is an explanation offered for a *law*—i.e., an empirically-established generalization. What natural selection “explains” (i.e., slow, steady, “progressive” change in any given species) is not a law. (Anyone heard of “[punctuated equilibria](#)”?)
- The basis for Darwin's “natural selection” was the “law” of excess births promulgated by Rev. Thomas Malthus—a law in *name* only, for it had no empirical support, being simply a speculative guess on the part of the good reverend (please excuse my facetiousness here).

- From that “law” Darwin deduced that the excess would *need* to be reduced (virtually by definition—given the concept of a “carrying capacity”), and that this reduction would *necessarily* occur via intra-specific competition. This deduction overlooked the fact that *predation* is another process that can reduce the excess, and that [predation](#) has, in fact, been an important factor in nature. ([Ecology](#) is sometimes defined as the discipline that studies “who eats whom.”)
- Given that the process of intra-specific competition would occur primarily with the just-born, “success” in the competition (i.e., *survival*) would necessarily depend on, and *only* on, an *inherited* trait(s)—that trait(s) that would confer one an advantage in the competition. (The just-born *cannot* have acquired traits, unless one argues that one can acquire certain traits while still in the womb.)
- The just-born, like all others, would be “on their own” since birth. (How *any* then manage to survive is, then, a troubling question for Darwin’s “theory”!)
- Over time, the process of competition would result slow, steady, “progressive” change in the given *species*—in terms of the “success” trait, and any variables that happened to be correlated with that trait. However, this change would be only of a *quantitative* sort—meaning that no evolution had occurred! (That is, the given species would change in certain of its characteristics, but would not become a new species.)
- Although it’s true that Darwin began to use “survival of the fittest” as a substitute for “natural selection” in the fifth edition of *The Origin of Species*, it’s clear that Herbert [Spencer](#) (from whom he borrowed the term) misunderstood what Darwin meant by “natural selection,” and also clear that Darwin misunderstood what Spencer meant by “struggle for existence”! Given that fact, it is a mistake to treat the two terms as if they are synonymous in meaning.

I have said enough about the “theory” to demonstrate that it was a scientifically *worthless* one—which fact, however, did not prevent it from being embraced by most scientists of the time (Prince Peter [Kropotkin](#) being a notable exception). The fact that the “theory” was compatible with the mindset of the English Victorian elite would seem to explain *why* it became accepted—except by those who objected to the fact that the “theory” left God out of the picture.

To take Darwin’s “theory” of natural selection/survival of the fittest and apply it to a (human) social context, one must, obviously, take liberties with the theory. And different individuals doing so are likely to arrive at different versions of Social Darwinism. For example, one version of the doctrine emphasizes the “fact” that Darwin had “established” that intra-specific competition is a law of nature; and that although humans *can* violate laws of nature (given that they have “free will”), they *should* not do so. Why not? There are at least two possible answers that can be given:

- If competition is restricted “artificially,” the result will be genetic deterioration of the species, so that to correct that problem, sterilization of the “unfit” or some other measure(s) will need to be instituted.
- If competition is restricted “artificially,” those who achieve the highest positions in the society (which are the ones most important for the society’s “health”) will not necessarily be the best individuals from a genetic standpoint—i.e., those with the highest intelligence, the best judgment, etc.

Thus, we already have two versions of Social Darwinism, each with its own solution to the problem of “artificial restriction” of competition—but Jamieson evinces no indication that she recognizes the diversity that exists with “Social Darwinism.”

Another version of Social Darwinism, however (in addition to the two identified above), is one that specifies that people are “naturally” on their own, and that is how it should be. This version recognizes that people naturally—and necessarily—occur in family units, and means by “on their own” that it is unnatural for families to receive any sort of *outside support*—whether that support would come from government, from individuals, or private organizations (such as the Red Cross). In particular does this version of Social Darwinism object to *governmental* support being rendered—the basis for that objection being (presumably) that given that we are all taxpayers, those of us who are *not* receiving government aid are *forced* to participate in that support of those others who *are* receiving aid—and that isn’t right.

There are, then, at least *three* versions of Social Darwinism, but Jamieson gives the impression that there is one “correct” version, “that extension of Darwinism, that essentially says that those who are innately superior, often biologically superior, are advantaged in the conflict among or between groups.” In terms of the first two versions of Social Darwinism that I identified above, I find it difficult to relate Jamieson’s version with either of my versions. She seems to accept the second of my versions over the first one, but her reference to “biologically superior” *could* be interpreted as providing a basis for supporting government-sponsored eugenics measures.

Likely Jamieson is correct in stating that Obama, in using the term “Social Darwinism,” may have meant that Republicans tend to believe that “each person is on his own—no help from others, no government help.” Obama’s concept of “Social Darwinism” *may* be more complex and nuanced than Jamieson makes it out to be, but I doubt seriously that that’s the case. However, Jamieson’s implicit suggestion that Obama’s concept of “Social Darwinism” is somewhat esoteric is “off base” given what I said about Darwin’s “theory” of natural selection in my bulleted presentation above.

Obama, in using the term “Social Darwinism,” should have made clear *how* he was conceiving the term. That he didn’t likely means that “Social Darwinism” is a term that he has heard, and has formulated some sort of concept of what the term means, but that concept is rather vague, not well developed. Given this, he would have been wise not to have used the term, for doing so has simply opened a “can of worms” that opens him up to criticism. The problem with *that* is that critics are likely to give “Social Darwinism” meanings that are also vague, but having a different “thrust” from the one given by Obama. As a result, there may be argumentation back and forth without much real communication. On the other hand, Obama is a “talker” and therefore might welcome an opportunity to be in the public eye—for after all, he hopes to be re-elected this fall!

[After writing this today, and sending to Sufyan, I discovered Robert Reich’s (rreich@berkeley.edu) “[The Choice in 2012: Social Darwinism or a Decent Society](#).” I then sent my essay, along with this message, to Bob:

Dr. Reich,

I always enjoy reading your columns, with your recent Truthout one on Social Darwinism being the most recent example. Before reading it, I had just completed writing “Obama and Social Darwinism” (attached), and sent to the www.bravenewworld.in web site (on which I have 70 or so of my essays).

A correction: Darwin used “survival of the fittest” for the first time in the 5th edition of *The Origin of Species*—a point which I comment on in the attached.

Best regards,

Al Thompson, Ph. D.
Greendale, Wisconsin

Shortly after sending the second email, I got this response to the first one:

Very interesting. Many thanks.

Robert B. Reich
Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy
Goldman School of Public Policy
University of California, Berkeley

What Christianity Should Be (But Isn't), and *Why* It Isn't

Alton C. Thompson

As I suggested recently in my “[NeWFism: A Religion for the Twenty-First Century](#),” Christianity is fraught with problems, which raises the question: Why, then, does it continue in existence? My brief answer: It is *functional* in the context of our societal system—a claim that I will expand on later. First, though, I would like to produce a catalog of Christianity’s deficiencies, attempting not to repeat unduly what I stated in the earlier essay. The “deficiencies” claim is, of course, one that I make as a “purist”—recognizing that from a functional standpoint Christianity is *anything but* deficient. Given my proclivity for using “bullets,” I will continue that practice in the present essay.

- It is a mistake to create a religion whose orientation is to a historical—or *claimed* historical—individual. This is true especially regarding a historical individual for whom inadequate information is available. In the case of Jesus, for example, scholars are in agreement that Jesus wrote nothing, and did not even have the *ability* to write. Presumably he spoke Aramean, and could understand Aramean being spoken by others; and although he likely could understand Hebrew being spoken, it is unlikely that he could understand spoken Greek—and extremely unlikely that he could write in either Hebrew or Greek.

None of Jesus’s contemporaries—Hebrew, Greek, or Roman—wrote anything about Jesus, our earliest knowledge of Jesus coming from the extant (authentic) letters of Paul of Tarsus. But Paul never had any direct contact with Jesus, at most having contact with a few people who had had contact. Given that it is unknown whether Paul could speak or write in Aramaic (his letters are in Greek), it is unclear how Paul learned about Jesus—and likely that translation problems resulted in some misunderstanding of what he learned.

The four (canonical) gospels give information about Jesus, but they were all written several decades after Paul wrote his letters; therefore, their veracity is in even more doubt than the letters of Paul—which provide little information about Jesus anyway. Historian Bart D. [Ehrman](#) has recently argued that there are good reasons for believing that Jesus *did* exist, but that book will not quell the debate over whether or not he did, and, if so, what he was “about.” What those facts imply is that too many people will continue to focus on such questions at the expense of more important questions.

- Related to this misguided focus on the life of a particular individual, there has been an excessive focus on the development of a set of *beliefs* about Jesus, *rituals* pertaining to

his life, and *celebrations* geared to events—or supposed events—in his life. This has been done at the expense of trying to discern his *teachings*, and efforts at promulgating those teachings. What hasn't been recognized is that a focus on beliefs is *divisive*; it establishes *barriers* between people, and because of that fact may result in individuals *behaving* relative to others that are contrary to what Jesus taught. Besides, given that the extant knowledge about Jesus gives us no reason to think that Jesus was concerned with beliefs and rituals, is it not ridiculous—and more—for us to have such a concern?!

- Granted that different people will interpret—from the extant knowledge about Jesus—the nature of his teaching differently. However, there should be no question that the “heart” of his “ministry” was promulgation of the “law” that one should love the neighbor: If one does not, e.g., interpret the [Good Samaritan parable](#) that way, one is simply not being honest with oneself. Besides, given that Jesus was a Jew (and *not* a Christian!), and that that “law” was central to the Scripture (if not Jewish religion) of Hebrew society, it is difficult to believe that this would not have been central in his ministry.

However, it is important to realize that the society within which Jesus lived was an occupied (by the Romans) one, and that that fact necessarily placed limitations on his preaching. His preaching was *individualistic* in character in that was addressed to individuals, and gave them advice regarding how one should relate to other individuals. Although some of the most important “laws” in Hebrew Scripture were *societal* in orientation (e.g., the law of the [tithe](#)), the societal situation that Jesus found himself in did not lend itself to anything other than individualistic injunctions.

That fact has not, however, been recognized by most Christian leaders, and they have continued to “ape” Jesus in that regard—despite the fact that they do not live in occupied societies. Rather than make an attempt to update Jesus’s message, they have retained its out-of-date nature—when, that is, they have paid it any attention at all! Occasionally there will be an attempt at updating—such as William T. Stead’s [If Christ Came to Chicago](#) (1894). But Stead was an English journalist, not a part of the religious establishment.

- If there has been a general lack of updating from a *societal* standpoint, there has also been a failure to look beyond the present. Given that at present we humans are in a precarious position because of the threat posed by global warming, with the strong possibility that few humans will be alive at the end of this century (perhaps only 500 million, per James Lovelock), it should be clear that this threat is the premiere *moral* issue of the day. Yet, where are the Christian leaders who are speaking out regarding this threat and trying to do anything about it? (If you know of any, please educate me!)
- In chapters 14, 15, and 16 of John’s (canonical) gospel, there is reference to a [paraclete](#). This is translated variously, including as “Holy Spirit” with the suggestion that after Jesus’s departure this Being (if *that’s* how one interprets it) will provide guidance to people. Now if that’s the case, the further suggestion is that the Bible should no longer

be regarded as an authority, and neither should religious leaders (such as the pope)! I believe that those associated with the Society of Friends (“Quakers”) are sympathetic to this interpretation, but I’m not aware of any other Christian denomination that is. Why not? (I’ll address that question shortly.) (Note that one need not refer to the paraclete as some sort of supernatural Being. In fact, insofar as I think of paraclete “possession,” I think of it as an altered state of consciousness, or a “natural high.” See [Jesus the Healer](#) by Stevan L. Davies, 1995).

- If the *paraclete* is to be our source of authority, and if one does not necessarily conceive this as a Being, the question arises: How can one “attract” this “thing”? The Quakers evidently believe that by meeting in silence, a point will be reached when one or more of those in attendance will receive a message from the paraclete, and are then expected to share that message with the others in the group. I would suggest, rather, that those meeting do so as members of a New Word Fellowship (NeWF), as described on p. 38 ff. of my [“Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning.”](#)

If the above discussion describes what Christianity should be like, but isn’t, a question that arises is : Why is this so? I suggested in the first paragraph that Christianity is this way because being this way is *functional* for our society. In my [“The Need for Change”](#) I stated:

Societies are *systems*. As such, they not only consist of *sectors*, but those sectors are *inter-related*. At a *given* point in time, however, one of those sectors tends to be dominant relative to the other sectors, meaning that the “other” sectors *serve* the dominant one. Those in the subservient sectors may not be aware that their sector is a subservient one; and, on the other hand, those in the dominant sector do not necessarily *consciously* impose themselves upon the subservient sectors. Typically, there is a lack of such awareness both on the part of those in the dominant sector and those in the other sectors—which fact contributes to the “working” of the system, the fact that it functions, and *continues* to function, in an almost machine-like fashion.

At times some sand gets into the gears of this machine, but this is more likely to occur by accident rather than conscious design. However, consciousness tends to be more present among those in the dominant sector than those in the other ones, so that members of the dominant sector often are *deliberate* in their efforts to shape one or more of the subservient sectors. Some of those in subservient sectors (e.g., some in academia and in journalism) may become aware of the fact that they are in a subservient sector, and may object to that position; however, such individuals tend to be “voices crying in the wilderness” in that they are paid little heed. And, of course, there are those many prostitutes in the intellectual class who glory in being lackeys who serve the interests of the dominant class (see, e.g., [this](#)).

The society’s sector which is dominant changes over time, but for several centuries now the *Economy* has been the dominant sector—with commerce giving way to industry, and now finance. All other sectors of our society are subservient to the Economy—not out of choice, but because, the societal system *requires* this. That is, the other sectors will develop characteristics

that help it serve the needs of the dominant sector—and this is as true of the religion sector as all other ones. Thus, those who think of the religion, education, etc. sectors as being independent of one another and of the Economy, are simply deluding themselves. A recent Gallup survey concluded that the state of Mississippi is the most “religious” state in the country; and not only did this “study” tacitly assume religion’s independence, but assumed (wrongly!) that the concept of “religion” that guided their “research” had any bearing on the (apparent) teachings of Jesus!

What makes Christianity *functional*—in service of the Economy? (Note that religion has not adapted as a matter of conscious choice but, rather, because of the system’s needs: Somehow, a societal system is able to “govern” itself.)

- Its orientation to (esoteric) beliefs.
- Its orientation to Bible interpretation rather than to contemporary issues—i.e., to “safe” subjects, rather than to ones that might potentially be controversial.
- Its emphasis on ritual and the observance of “holy” days (such as Easter).
- Meetings that emphasize a given person giving what amounts as a lecture to his/her “students,” without an opportunity, on their part, to ask questions or discuss matters among themselves.
- Insofar as attention is given to what one should, and should not, do, the emphasis is *individualistic*, with little or no attention given to one’s role as a *citizen*—either or one’s community, state, country, or world.
- The focus tends to be either on the distant past (as recorded in the Bible) or the here-and-now, without any consideration of what the future might have in store. (Except that in some churches the concept of a “Rapture” is preached, so that congregants may become convinced that because of the Lord’s imminent return, there is no reason to give thought to the threat posed by global warming—which may be denied anyway!)

Recently the www.truthdig.com web site had this [posting](#) (conversation between [Chris Hedges](#) and [Alain de Botton](#)), and I made this comment on their conversation:

Religion, as we know it in the United States, is a part of the societal system. The Economy is the dominant component of that system, and all other components—including religion, of course—are subservient to the dominant sector. Given this, what is there about our religion that is worth keeping? (A rhetorical question, obviously.)

Fortunately, our societal system is in the process of collapse (most notably because of global warming), and although few will be alive after global warming has run its

course (perhaps as few as 100 million, per James Lovelock), perhaps these survivors will create a religion worth having.

As societies (including ours) begin to collapse within a few decades (as the result of “global warming”), an opportunity will arise for new societal systems to emerge during this period of chaos; there will also be the opportunity for this process of change being led by the new religion of [NeWFism](#). Thus, it’s conceivable that religion (in the form of NeWFism) could emerge as the dominant societal sector within a few decades—and in a form that, e.g., welcomes diversity rather than establishes boundaries. Whether that occurs

[April 13, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/13/the-times-they-are/>]

The Times They Are . . .

Alton C. Thompson

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone

These [words](#), written by Bob Dylan in the autumn of 1963,[1] call to mind the flood of the Bible ([Genesis 6](#), New International Version):

⁵ The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

⁶ The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them."

¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.

Although Dylan's song and Genesis have in common that both refer to destruction by water what's relevant for today is the destruction part, but only in part by water. True, *some* destruction is likely come directly from water (i.e., flooding), but also directly from, e.g., starvation, fire, disease, and violence—the cause of all of these being that complex of atmospheric phenomena usually referred to as "global warming"

This is a time in which our leaders—in the economy and government—fit the Genesis description of being "wicked" and with "evil" thoughts. But *that* is not why they may suffer destruction; and the destruction will not be God's doing. Rather, the destruction will result from the dark side of "progress": As technological developments have enabled the extraction and use of fossil fuels, the burning of those fuels has resulted in a transfer of carbon from below Earth's surface to the atmosphere, where it has acted as a "[greenhouse](#)" [gas](#). As, that is, a "trap" for the long-wave energy emanating from Earth (as a result of the prior short-wave energy from the sun heating earth).

Earth, as a system, has been using the negative feedback mechanisms with which it had become “equipped” to “fight” the resulting heating of the atmosphere. But those mechanisms have given way—or soon will—to positive feedback mechanisms that will hasten heating. Not only heating, I should add, but the other atmospheric changes associated with heating—such as increased storminess, an increase in the number of severe storms, and increased variability in atmospheric conditions at any given location.

“Climate scientists” such as [James Lovelock](#) have argued that as these atmospheric changes are occurring, it is likely that a severe culling of the world’s population will occur—so that by the end of this century the world’s population may be reduced to around 500 million (i.e., about 7% of the current 7 billion)—or even less.

This culling is likely to be highly *selective*—but in a manner that would be the virtual inverse of Charles Darwin’s “natural selection.” With “natural selection” the environment is assumed to be fixed, including having a fixed “carrying capacity,” but population is assumed to be ever growing. This implies that at some point an excess of individuals will occur, and this excess will be short-lived of necessity—the excess being “handled” by intra-specific competition. Today, the situation is that the human population is growing while the environment—as a result of human past and present activity—is changing in a negative direction so far as “carrying capacity” is concerned. In fact, the very concept of “carrying capacity” is becoming obsolete given that the regularity that we have assumed (in seasonal changes) is rapidly disappearing—so that the very concept of “climate” is becoming meaningless.

Who will survive this culling process? My best guesses:

- Those who have anticipated the ravages of global warming, have recognized that our only option is to adapt as best we can to the changes that will inevitably occur, have engaged in planning efforts, and have acted on those plans.
- Those who—like the Amish—already have a way of life that is “pre-adapted”—to a significant degree, at least—to the changes that are likely to occur. And as such people see the need to adapt further, I’m confident that they will do so.
- The “lucky”—although it’s difficult to conceive that *any* of those who survive will think of themselves as “lucky.”[2]

The term “selective survival” seems to suggest that those who survive will be *genetically* different from those culled, but my own opinion on this matter is that any genetic difference between survivors and non-survivors is likely to be slight. My hope, however, is that those who survive have the wisdom to recognize that their task is to create *institutions* different from those which have been common so far, to recognize that humans have “design specifications,”[3] and work to ensure that they develop a way of life (or ways of life) that will enable all to live in accord with their “design specifications” as humans.

A point to keep in mind here is the wise counsel of Gregory Bateson that: “It would not be wise (even if possible) to return to the innocence of the Australian aborigines, the Eskimo, and the Bushman. Such a return would involve loss of the wisdom which prompted the return and would only start the whole process over.”[4] That is, there *is* a need to “return” in some important sense (*I* would say in terms of human “design specifications”), but in doing so we need to use our brains—for a change. (After all, does not our current predicament call into question our claim to be the most intelligent of all species?!)

Brilliant scientist John Todd, presumably had Noah’s ark in mind when, in 1974, he left his position with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts to return to his native Canada and “build ‘An ARK for P.E.I.’ at Spry Point on [Prince Edward Island](#), on contract to the Federal government. When completed in 1976, the ARK had become a test bed of many of the principles that became the ‘living machine’, as well as a number of trailblazing and now established green or sustainable elements: solar orientation, solar collectors, wind energy, thermal storage, and composting toilet.” That is, Todd was a scientist who early on became aware of the environmental crisis that would be affecting humankind, and used his many talents to develop what came to be called “[appropriate](#)” technologies. ([E. F. Schumacher](#) [1911 – 1977] was to become the unofficial “philosopher” of his movement, his *Small is Beautiful: Economic as if People Mattered* having been published in 1973.)

The “ark” analogy is a very appropriate one, but I tend to conceive “ark” differently than Todd does. Whereas Todd’s focus has been on developing “appropriate” technology, and he has made an important contribution in that area, I tend to think of a “ark” as a *place of residence*. Specifically, I think of the sort of “ark” needed today as a small community within which the residents are so linked—by law and practice—that they form what might be termed a “family of families.” That is, the community would be unlike communities as we know them today in being more like a “primitive” clan in that “the concerns of one would be the concerns of all.” I realize that such a “thrust” has the potential of being confining, smothering; thus, care must be taken in ensuring that that does not occur (as I suggest in my eBook (see Chapter 3 of the eBook referenced in endnote 3 below).

Beyond that, I recommend widespread use of the Structured Interaction Group (SIG)—or NeWF, as I termed it elsewhere[5]—for the reasons specified in “Worship,” and serious attention given to human “design specifications.” I *do* believe, with John Todd that there is a serious need for the development and deployment of “appropriate” technology, but also believe, with the creators of [Gaviotas](#), that it’s important that people be *involved* in the communities that they build and “run “ In our current society the common practice is for developers to develop a subdivision—without any input from potential residents—and then sell the houses that they build to people. As the son of a carpenter, this practice “rubs me the wrong way.” When my dad and his partner built a house, it was to the specifications of the owner; it is “natural,” then, that I have developed a mindset that is sympathetic to that of those who created Gaviotas.

My goal in life is to promote that concept and—if I am fortunate—to reach a point where I will engage in “hands on” efforts to help that process along.

Endnotes

1. This morning, in driving in to work, I listened to the Judy Collins version of the song. I love not only her voice, but the songs that she chooses to sing.
2. Some might argue that the best adaptive strategy is that of suicide!
3. See Chapter 2 of my [What Are Churches For?](#), with Chapters 3 and 4 also being relevant.
4. [Steps to an Ecology of Mind](#): *Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1987, p. 347 (in the .pdf file; the pages themselves are unnumbered in this edition). Originally published by the Chandler Publishing Company, 1972.
5. See p. 38 ff. in my [“Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning.”](#)

[April 14, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/14/just-ruling-ideas/>]

Just Ruling Ideas?

Alton C. Thompson

[Karl Marx](#) [1818 – 1883] and [Friedrich Engels](#) [1820 – 1895], in their [The German Ideology](#)[1], famously stated:

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.”

My purpose here is not to dispute that claim (“truism” would be a more accurate descriptor!) but only to add a further point to it, and then to expand on that point. My further point:

The ruling class manipulates the *emotions* of those in the “lower” classes in such a way as to protect itself from deposition by members of the “lower” classes. This manipulation is undertaken *unconsciously*, making it all the more effective—in enabling the ruling class to continue its rule.

The larger principle at work here is;

The best way to keep others in their place is to work it so that they keep *themselves* in their place. This can be done both by controlling the *ideas* that they accept (i.e., their beliefs), and their *emotions* as well. In fact, control of their emotions is particularly effective, given that behavior tends to be more a function of emotional state than belief system.

The events in my life which have caused me to formulate this hypothesis are twofold: (1) The claim made by some in our society, in recent months (during which election campaigning has been occurring), that the call for higher taxes for the rich constitutes “class warfare.” (2) Paul Buchheit’s recent “[Ozzie and the Submissiveness Syndrome](#).” (The “Ozzie” in Buchheit’s article is a reference to Oswaldo José (“Ozzie”) Guillén Barrios, currently manager of the Miami Marlins baseball team.[2])

What especially caught my eye in Buchheit’s article was his reference to social psychologist Susan T. Fiske, author of (among many other works) [Envy Up, Scorn Down: How Status Divides Us](#). [3] Fiske was also a co-author (with Lasana T. Harris and Mina Cikara) of “[Envy as Predicted by the Stereotype Content Model: A Volatile Ambivalence](#),” [4] in which envy is referred to (p. 133) as “an ambivalent reaction that entails both admiration and dislike to social targets.” It is beyond the scope of this essay to comment on that article [5], except to note that what that statement implies is that envy—perhaps emotions in general—is an emotion that is

induced by certain *situations*, with those situations being properly taken as “givens” whose existence is not, therefore, to be analyzed.

But *is* that the case? Is it not possible, rather, that members of the non-elite feel envy, not because of the *situation* of inequality that exists but because that emotion has been *induced* in members of the non-elite by the elite? Not *consciously* induced, true, but induced nonetheless—this done because the existence of such an emotion in members of the non-elite is *to the interests* of members of the elite.

This possibility raises at least two questions:

- Why would members of the elite “want” those who are non-members to feel envy?
- If feelings of envy, on the part of the non-elite, have been *induced* by members of the elite, this suggests that such feelings did not arise “naturally” in members of the non-elite. And if they did not arise “naturally,” what emotion *would*, then, have arisen “naturally” had it been allowed to emerge?

As to why the elite might “want” (at least unconsciously) member of the non-elite to feel envious of them, on the surface this is a ridiculous question to ask. For why on earth would members of the elite “welcome” this emotion on the part of their “inferiors”? Would not the elite be asking for trouble in so doing? And given this, how can it possibly make any sense to claim that the elite would *want* others to feel envious of it?

Actually, the answer to this question lies in this statement, the first in the “Book Description” of *Envy Up, Scorn Down* given on the Amazon.com web site (to which a link was provided above): “The United States was founded on the principle of equal opportunity for all, and this ethos continues to inform the nation's collective identity.”

The fact that the United States has long been promoted as the “land of opportunity” has not only *belief* implications for the “inmates” of this country, but *emotional* implications as well. For if one accepts as “true” that this is a land of opportunity, on the one hand one will agree with the rich that they have become rich because of their superior abilities and hard work, and that one occupies one’s much lower position either because one is lacking in ability (whether innate or acquired) or has not put enough effort into becoming rich—because, perhaps, of a lack of interest in becoming rich.

But this “philosophy” not only will cause one to accept, intellectually, one’s “place” in the scheme of things. Being in that “place” may very well cause one to experience *envy* of those who are rich. This feeling may “eat away” at one, but because it is *envy* rather than *anger*, the emotion will not cause one to take any action against the rich—for one so deeply holds the belief that *merit* is involved both in the rich person’s “success” and one’s own “failure” that to take action against the rich would “tell the world” that one is, *oneself*, a failure. For given that this is

a “land of opportunity,” what one’s own low position “means” is that one has not taken advantage of the opportunities that lie before one; therefore, one has “earned” one’s lowly position.

Why *should* a situation of inequality cause one to experience anger rather than envy? And what *difference* would it make if one felt anger rather than envy?

In answering the first question, one could argue that the tenets of the “opportunity” philosophy are lacking in empirical support; but even though [this is true](#), it may be difficult to convince others—and even oneself—that this is the case.[6] Insofar as *that’s* the case, one would still be inhibited from acting because of one’s being imprisoned by feelings of envy.

Rather than attempting to *disprove* “opportunity theory,” one might, rather, come to believe that release could be better obtained if there were an *alternate theory* “out there” that one could *embrace*. Fortunately, there *is* such a “theory”!

As I note in Chapter 2 of my [eBook](#), humans evolved in small groups that were basically egalitarian. When the Agricultural Revolution began to occur about 10,000 years ago, however, everyone began to lose the way of life that was “natural” for them: The gatherer-hunter way of life helped shaped how human biology developed, and as that biology developed (intelligence in particular), changes started to occur in that way of life. Those changes included changes in the stimuli to which one was exposed, the behaviors that one needed to engage in, the way one used one’s brain, etc. In addition, however, the *settlement pattern* began to change (i.e., it became more sedentary, with villages, and even cities, arising), and the *social structure* began to change: Societies became more and more *inegalitarian*.

As this was occurring, all individuals *sensed* that changes were occurring, but only a few *recognized* it. They may not have recognized that the need was for a return to a more “natural” way of life, but they *did* recognize that some were now mistreating others—which recognition made them *angry*. As one reads the diatribes offered by the various prophets of what Christians refer to as the “Old Testament,” one easily detects the anger in their voices. If one cannot, this is either because one is a robot or so “possessed” by conventional ideas/philosophies/ideologies that one *sees* through them (and, therefore, is unable to see *through* them).

Once one comes to understand that hierarchical societies are *unnatural*, this should enable one to experience *anger* rather than *envy*; it should also enable one to understand that their anger is best directed, not against the rich *per se*, but, rather, against the *sort of society* within which we live (i.e., a hierarchical, inegalitarian one).

Over the centuries a number of “[utopian](#)” works have been [written](#), these all motivated (if but unconsciously) by The Discrepancy that I discuss in Chapter 2 of my eBook, but what this literature has failed to announce is that existing ways of life are *unnatural*, and that the author

was presenting an alternate reality that he thought of (if but unconsciously) as more natural. That the fact of the “unnaturalness” of the existing way of life made him *angry*, in fact, and this anger motivated him to write the novel.

Not only have many utopian works been written over the years; many efforts at *realizing* those ideas have been attempted (based, e.g., on the ideas presented by [Charles Fourier](#) [1772 – 1837])—with all such attempts failing so far. Should our response to that fact be one of pessimism, to the extent that it disables us?

My view relative to this question is one of cautious optimism. I am convinced that societies—including most certainly ours—will be collapsing within a few decades, and that—as James Lovelock has noted—there is, therefore, the danger that we humans will be forced into a Stone Age existence. With most humans being killed (indirectly mainly) by global warming, and the few remaining being forced—for their very survival—to become gatherer-hunters once again.

But why just sit back and let this happen? Granted that we cannot halt global warming; we *can*, however, do what we can to adapt to the changes that will be inevitably occurring as a result of global warming. Doing this will not ensure the survival of oneself and one’s children/grandchildren; but, on the other hand, it *will* increase the probability of survival.

Why, then, does virtually everyone you meet, watch on television, read in the newspapers, etc., pretend that we are *not* in a crisis situation? Why does everyone seem to have their “head in the sand”? The answer in large part is that the elite is so fixated on the short run that they are doing nothing about addressing this problem—and are, in fact, doing what they can to ensure that *others* also have that same fixation.

One gains no sense of satisfaction in offering this explanation, however. For the point now is not to be occupied with that “Why?” question—or any other such question, for that matter—but to gear one’s thinking to the matter of what one should do to try to adapt, and then to act on one’s ideas/plans.

Endnotes

1. This book was written in early 1846, but not published until 1932—long after both authors had died.
2. Guillén had praised Cuba’s Fidel Castro to a *Time* magazine reporter, which fact offended many of the Cuban exiles living in the Miami area. This, in turn, caused the management of the Marlins to suspend Guillén for 5 days. Guillén, however, then recanted—or [ostensibly did so](#): “There is nothing to respect about Fidel Castro. He is a brutal dictator who caused unthinkable pain for more than 50 years. We live in a community filled with victims of his dictatorship and the people in Cuba continue to suffer today.”
3. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011.

4. Chapter 8 (pp. 133 – 147) in Richard Smith, ed., *Envy: Theory and Research*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
5. However, such an article might very well form the basis for arguing the thesis that “academese” is often a smokescreen for ignorance and/or a limited vision!
6. In addition, there is abundant [evidence](#) to the effect that egalitarian societies are in many respects “better” than ones that are not.

[April 13 (Friday!), 2012]: What I was trying to say in this essay is that if one accepts the equality of opportunity “philosophy,” and one is a “lower,” one will feel *envy*, and that feeling will inhibit one from changing the situation—because one will blame oneself for one’s position (and members of the elite “know” this). That is, the philosophy is linked to the emotion envy. If, however, one were to switch to the philosophy that I suggest (inequality is unnatural), the emotion that corresponds to it is one of *anger*, and *that* emotion does *not* so inhibit one. However, as more become aware of the fact of the “unearned” character of the wealth of the rich, envy may be replaced with anger. I sent an email to a Dr. Paul Buchheit, and this is his reponse: “Researchers talk about “benign envy” and “malicious envy,” and the latter brings anger into the mix. It certainly seems that what used to be envy in our country is turning into anger.” Paul (paul@usagainstgreed.org) is a college [teacher](#) somewhere—Chicago?]

[April 15, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/15/unravelling-the-knot/>]

“Unravelling the Knot”

Alton C. Thompson

Here is a [report](#) that should disturb all, whether or not one is a citizen of the United States: In October of 2011, (retired) Commander Leah Bolger interrupted a hearing of the Super Committee to deliver a message: End the wars and tax the rich to fix the deficit.

Because of her 45-second transgression, Commander Bolger now faces a court trial this Thursday morning, April 12, where she could receive a maximum jail sentence of six months. Bolger, 54, intends to plead guilty and use her court appearance to draw the connection between America’s deficit debacle and the three-quarters-of-a-trillion-dollar defense budget we, as voting taxpayers, spend as a base-mark for failed and unending military ventures overseas.

Bolger has no illusions about what Americans are up against: a corporate-run military machine that she says “is so big and complicated and intertwined with the government and Congress and the media that I don’t know where you can start unraveling the knot.”

As I read the above, I’m sure that my blood pressure began to soar. How can *anyone* read this without feeling a combination of sadness and anger; not just mild feelings, but strong ones—ones that make you want to scream. What kind of a country have we become anyway?!

The question is: What should one *do* about such feelings? Most of us occupy insignificant positions in society, and are far from wealthy—so that it is painful even to *ask* the question, because we can think of no clear answer. Should I join the Occupy movement? This might enable me to get rid of some of the frustration that has been building up inside me, but will it result in changing the situation? As I ask myself that question, I do so already knowing the answer: No! Those who join the Occupy movement presumably hope that if enough others join them, the media will give their movement publicity, our “leaders” (*rulers* is a more accurate term!), will take notice, and will pay heed to what we say. But *will* they? Again, the answer that I would give is: No! Given this, I can’t motivate myself to join the “Occupiers.”

What to *do*, then? My answer: Rather than thinking in terms of “unraveling the knot”—which assumes that the “knot” *can* be unraveled—I gain hope from the possibility that forces are operating that will do the “unraveling” for me. Forces that *exist* in large part because of actions *by* the elite but—ironically—forces that the elite can no longer control. Forces that have reached a point of development such that our only choice now, as humans, is to simply recognize them, and “go with the flow.”

Forces that will eventuate in an obliteration of the elite, but in the process will obliterate many others as well. Indeed, members of the elite may, during the early years, be in the best position to resist these Forces—so that those who initially suffer from those Forces will be those who played other than a leading role in calling those Forces into existence. This is not *fair*, I know, but is how it will likely be. However, in the long run the initial advantage of the elite will be eroded away, and they will be swept into oblivion. The survivors can then sing “[O happy day!](#)”—but with different lyrics.

The “Forces” that I have been referring to are, of course, those associated with “global warming” (or “climate change,” as some prefer to call it). The term itself refers to a complex of atmospheric phenomena that include (a) a warming trend—i.e., a trend in increase in the global mean (i.e., average) temperature, (b) increased storminess, (c) an increase in the number of severe storms, and (d) increased variability.

And although these atmospheric phenomena themselves can—and will—cause a significant loss of life (e.g., by flooding), more significant losses of life will come directly from causes that have themselves been caused by atmospheric changes: starvation, diseases, fires, violence, etc.

These various “forces” will cause the premature deaths of BILLIONS of people, but especially of people who ignore the “signs of the times” and continue to live as if tomorrow will be simply a repeat of today. Even those who recognize the threat posed by global warming, but look to government for “salvation” will be swept away—for the simple reason that governments are under the control of the elite, i.e., people who seem incapable of looking beyond next quarter’s profit-and-loss sheet.

Those with the best chance of surviving will be those who recognize that global warming is occurring, recognize that its’ “progress” cannot be halted, and who then develop plans to adapt to the changes that will be occurring—and act on those plans.

I would guess that most readers of postings on the www.bravenewworld.in web site are in this category! Given this, if you have any ideas regarding adaptation, I’m sure that Sufyan would like to receive them—so that he can then post them on his site.

[April 16, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/16/capitalism-dream-reality/>]

Capitalism: Dream and Reality [1]

Alton C. Thompson

[Robert B. Reich](#) has recently described how private equity partnerships (such as Bain Capital—with which Mitt Romney is associated) make all their money:

1. Rather than risking their own money, they borrow money from others for investment purposes.
2. They use that money to buy companies from which they think they can squeeze higher profits than are being “earned” currently.
3. They then squeeze as much profit as they can from those companies (e.g., by laying off workers, reducing wages, reducing benefits). (I would add that they also send jobs to other countries where the “labor conditions”—such as wages, regulations affecting workers, etc.—are more “liberal.”)
4. They use those companies as collateral to borrow money from banks.
5. They issue dividends to pay those from whom they had originally borrowed money.
6. They sell the company, for a larger amount than they had paid.
7. They pocket 20% of the gain from this sale.
8. Because the gain is a “capital gain,” they pay tax on it at a 15% rate.

The “fallout” from this—and there *is* fallout! (in the form of unemployment benefits, making up lost revenue, etc.)—is paid for by the rest of us. The question that arises here, of course, is: Is *this* what capitalism is supposed to be about?

When *I* have thought of “capitalism” (as it *should* be), I have thought of an economic system where:

1. Any member of the society who wishes to initiate a business, and is able to obtain the necessary financing to do so, is able to do so (unless the mores of the society are such that the proposed business is regarded as objectionable—and may, therefore, be outlawed).
2. The ownership of the business can take varying forms—from sole proprietorship, to partnership, to corporation, etc.

3. If the owners of the business believe that they are unable to “handle” all of the activities that will be involved with the business, they will hire others having the skills needed for those other activities.
4. In doing so, they will recognize that those others depend on your business for their support and will, therefore, pay them a “decent” wage, provide them with benefits, and make a commitment to them—to retain them in their employ for as long as the employee wishes to remain employed, to help them overcome any deficiencies (in performing tasks) that become evident, etc. If, after a short time, an employee demonstrates a lack of ability for the position for which s/he was hired, and efforts to compensate for those deficiencies have failed (e.g., special training, assignment to a different position), the employee will be terminated—but provided with severance pay.
5. If an employee demonstrates an ability to perform her/his work assignments well, and demonstrates a capacity for advancement, that employee will be advanced when an opportunity for such arises.
6. If an employee performs his/her work responsibilities well, but expresses political, religious, etc., views with which the owner(s) disagree, the owner(s) will nevertheless *not* terminate the employee, and will continue to treat the employee solely on the basis of work performance.
7. As shifts occur in the nature of the economy, the owner(s) will strive to retain the current employees (rather than, e.g., “outsourcing” their work to some other country), using whatever means they can conceive—such as changing the nature of the business. Engaging in such change may result in somewhat of a “mismatch” between the skills now needed and the skills possessed by current employees, and the owner(s) will attempt to correct that problem through re-training. Some employees may, however, either not *want* to be re-trained or lack the necessary ability to be retrained; the former will be free to leave the company to seek work elsewhere; the latter will be terminated—but with severance pay.

However, although I have conceived capitalism this way—and would like to think that [Adam Smith](#) [1723 – 1790] did as well—I would now qualify that view in two ways:

- I recognize that the sort of capitalism that exists today—as exemplified well by Romney’s Bain Capital—is a “far cry” from the conception that I have held of how capitalism should be.
- I have come to believe that capitalism, by its very nature, carries within it the seeds of the sort of development that has eventuated in the likes of Bain Capital. That is, I have come to believe that it is no accident that capitalism has taken the course that it has.

Given the latter conclusion, in conjunction with the conclusion that I have commented on in many of my essays (that global warming poses a significant threat to humankind), I cannot say that I am unhappy at the prospect of our society's demise—a demise that I see as not only possible, but extremely probable. But it is rational to welcome destruction only if one also sees something positive on the horizon—and what I see in such a light is the possibility that enough of my fellow humans will become “awakened” to the avenue of possible “salvation”—to a degree, at least—provided by the route of adaptation.

In taking that route it will be necessary to create some sort of economic system. The initial such system may resemble tribal groups of old in that they are small and “group-sufficient”—with each group capable of providing for its own needs, and actually doing so. However, as the New Economy develops a point will be reached where economic interaction can occur between nearby such groups, and once that begins, there will be the possibility of increased differentiation between groups (i.e., a division of labor occurring not only with groups, but between them).

Especially once that begins to occur will it be necessary to exercise care so that decisions aren't made that will eventuate in a situation such as exists now. We are living in Hell right now, and it would be foolish beyond belief to start on a course that leads to the same place!

Endnote

1. The allusion here is to [Nicholas Berdyaev's](#) *Dream and Reality*, 1949. This book by Berdyaev [1874 – 1948] is one of the prized books in my library, given to me by a friend while I was a senior in college.

Making an “About Face”

Alton C. Thompson

I was brought up to believe that to be a human being one must recognize that one *has* responsibilities, and must *accept* those responsibilities.[1] I was also taught, however, that having responsibilities was not a burden but a privilege—a privilege, in fact, that should be approached with a joyous spirit.[2] Over the years I have found that it is not easy to live by this principle—not *at all* easy, in fact! But that *ideal* has remained with me over the years.

Given that fact, when, in the late 1950s, I first became aware of the environmental threat[3]—first, the depletion of resources matter, and later the threat of global warming—I asked myself how I could contribute to the solution of those problems. Early on I had become convinced that the various problems faced by our society had a common cause, in that all were a function of our societal system. I therefore developed (and published in 1984 [4]) a 5-“wave” strategy for bringing about societal system change. But toward *what*? *That* question began to occupy me next.

In reading such works as [*So Human an Animal*](#) (1968) by René J. Dubos, [*The Biological Origin of Human Values*](#) (1977) by George Edgin Pugh, and [*Sociobiology and Behavior*](#) (1977) by sociobiologist David P. Barash, I found the Barash book in particular of value, for it introduced me to the concept of the Discrepancy.

The basis for that concept is the idea that as we humans were developing biologically, our gatherer-hunter way of life—which existed within the context of small cooperative groups—shaped *how* that development occurred. However, as biological development occurred—and especially the development of our brains and our capacity for communication—*those* changes became, in turn, a cause of changes in way of life: The domestication of plants, and later animals, led to a sedentary way of life, the development of larger social groups, the development of cities—and the development of class-caste social systems.

These changes brought about changes in the stimuli to which one was exposed, the behaviors in which one engaged, how one used one’s brain, etc. What those changes implied was that there was occurring an increasing “discrepancy” between the way of life for which one had become “*designed*” (by evolutionary forces) and the way of life one actually *lived*. For as changes were occurring in way of life, comparable changes were *not* occurring in human biology.[5] These changes were more of a problem for “lowers” than for “uppers” (given that the latter were becoming parasites relative to the former), but, nonetheless, were a problem for *everyone*. The implication of this Discrepancy concept is that because our various problems are a function of

our way of life, they can only be solved via movement in the direction of a more “natural” way of life—a “return” in some meaningful sense.[6]

When I wrote my “Ecotopia” article in 1984, I assumed that transformation of our society would be accompanied by a cessation in population growth; I did not, at that point, however, conceive the possibility that a severe culling of the world’s population was on the horizon. However, at a later point I made my first contact with the work of British scientist [James Lovelock](#), and became converted to his way of thinking—including his [conclusion](#) that by the end of this century the world’s population would be reduced, by “global warming,”[7] to but a small fraction of its current 7 billion.

Given this (very strong) possibility (to the degree that it is highly *probable*), it became clear to me that societal system change, as I had been conceiving it, was *not* an option. As we had apparently passed a point of no return regarding global warming (or soon would—because of “inertia” in our societal system), we *had* reached a point where global warming could not be halted—a point that even James Lovelock admitted, despite the fact that he had included a chapter on “geo-engineering” in his most recent (2009) book, [The Vanishing Face of Gaia](#). Our only option now, I concluded, was that of *adaptation*, and even following *that* option would result in but a few humans surviving. What was needed, I concluded, was an effort to build a New Society within the shell of the Existing (rotten) Order, doing so in the form of small communities that, in the initial phase of the movement, would need to strive for as high a degree of “community-sufficiency” as possible.

Having made that conclusion, I began to write a series of essays promoting this idea from different “angles,” and sending them to the Brave New World web site. Yesterday (April 15, 2012), however, the “thrust” of my thinking began to take a new direction. Despite the fact that I have been highly critical of Christianity, I attend a Presbyterian church near my home (which shares its building with a Moslem group), and during the adult class which precedes the church “service,” as well as during the “service” itself, my thinking began to become re-oriented. The Biblical passage for the day was [Acts](#) 4:32 - 35:

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

A passage that echoes Psalm 133:

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Although I indicated in an [earlier essay](#) that the modern mind cannot accept the claim that Jesus was resurrected, what this Acts passage suggests is that the *earliest* followers of Jesus were so convinced that this “event” had occurred that their behavior was affected in an interesting way: They became so filled with love for their (in-group) “neighbors” that they gave up the concept of the private ownership of property, and shared with others in the group—to the point that no one in the group was “needy.”[8]

How different the situation is today, however. David Kinnaman, in a notable recent study (his results reported in *unChristian: [What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity](#)*, 2007) of the “young” (i.e., those from the late teens to early thirties) outside the church perceived Christianity this way:

antihomosexual	91%
judgmental	87%
hypocritical	85%
old-fashioned	78%
too political	75%
out of touch with reality	72%
insensitive to others	70%
boring	68%

These are damning judgments—or hopeful ones, depending on one's perspective. They indicate, on the one hand, that Christianity—perhaps some denominations more than others, though—is in serious trouble; but indicate, on the other hand, that [NeWFism](#) has a good chance of growing at an exponential rate.

But that's not what I want to focus on here. What I want to focus on, rather, is the (apparent) fact that the early followers of Jesus achieved a state of “consciousness” (as a result of their conviction that Jesus had been resurrected, apparently) such that they found it “natural” to perceive the *absence* of a boundary between themselves and others (but perhaps only other

“followers”), and therefore treated *others* as they would treat *themselves*. They found it “natural” to give up the concept of the private ownership of property, and “natural” to want to share what they had with others in the group who might be needy. It’s as if they became convinced that *everything* belonged to God, and that their only role in the “scheme of things” was to become alert to neediness “out there,” and to then act to reduce that neediness. Acts refers to this attitude as having been restricted to members of the group, but *if* in fact this attitude arose, it is entirely believable that it became *generalized*.

But the attitude did not *last*, and it’s not clear how *long* it lasted or *why* it dissipated. The “fact” of its former existence suggests at least three questions, however:

- *Can* this attitude be restored?
- If so, *how*?
- Given that Christianity has been in existence for over 2,000 years, and the “sharing” principle would seem to be a primary feature of Christianity (as it *should* be, that is), why haven’t Christian intellectuals developed a sharing system that had the *capability* of being implemented?

Let me address this last question first. If one examines Hebrew Scripture, one finds examples of sharing systems that had been “worked out.” Whether they were actually *implemented* is a different matter, but the mere fact that sharing systems were “thought up” is highly significant. In my eBook I identify the following categories in discussing (on pp. 17 – 37) the ethical laws found in Hebrew Scripture:

I. Ameliorative

A. Direct

1. Injunctions
 - a. Abstract
 - b. Specific
2. Prohibitions
 - a. Abstract
 - b. Specific

B. Indirect (all of which are specific)

1. Injunctions
2. Prohibitions

II. Restorative

- A. Abstract
- B. Specific.

If our reference is to a *sharing system*, the discussion in the eBook that has particular relevance is I.B. (indirect) portion on pp. 19 – 20, and I find two of these laws as of particular interest, first, the gleanings law (stated, e.g., in [Leviticus](#) 19:9, 10):

⁹ “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.

In this case one is not asked to *give* to the needy, except in an indirect sense. Rather, one is enjoined to refrain from harvesting all of one’s produce—so that those in need of food can “glean” one’s land. Because the needy are, in this case, required to “*work*” for their food (the harvesting part at least), they are able to retain their self-respect.

A different (but also indirect) approach is outlined in Deuteronomy 14:22 – 29:

²² Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. ²³ Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. ²⁴ But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), ²⁵ then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. ²⁶ Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. ²⁷ And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own.

²⁸ At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year’s produce and store it in your towns, ²⁹ so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

This “tithing” law—described in a very different manner in most Christian churches!—is interesting in that for every two years out of three one is asked to bring a tenth of one’s production of food items (or its monetary equivalent) to a certain location, and then have a celebration with that food and drink. This is to be done not for the purpose of having a “good time,” however, but for the purpose of reminding them who their rightful ruler was—God; perhaps also reminding them that the land, after all, *belonged* to God, so that they had a legal *obligation* to do with those food items what *God* wanted done with them.

On the third of every three years, however, one was to take the tithe of one's *produce* (i.e., excluding cattle and sheep) and store it in the towns; this would then be made available—for the taking—by the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. This method of redistribution also, note, enabled the “patrons” of these “food pantries” to maintain their self-respect because they were not required to come into direct contact with the direct providers of the produce—and because they also knew that the food was available because God wanted it to be available, God being its owner anyway.

As I thought about the Acts passage in conjunction with the above two passages, I thought to myself: “Given that indirect ways of redistributing income have advantages over more direct ways, that Christianity has existed for over 2,000 years now, and that sharing would seem to be a central tenet of Christianity, why has no progress been made in developing a *workable* sharing procedure(s)?” Has it been a lack of creativity or, rather, simply a lack of interest? Sadly, my conclusion: It's the latter; and largely because of that fact, it's no wonder that those outside the churches perceive Christians as homophobic, judgmental, boring, etc. I don't know if the concepts of gleaning and tithing as described above were ever actually *implemented*. But even if they weren't, they were—and are—brilliant creations of the human mind, and I know nothing remotely resembling them in Christianity.

Having reached this conclusion, a thought—principle, actually—occurred to me, principle that has caused me to re-direct my thinking:

If you give appropriate attention to the short run, the long run will take care of itself.

What “appropriate attention” to the short run means is that a *workable system(s)* be developed for sharing; and that if this is accomplished, addressing the (relatively) long-run problem of global warming will take care of itself. This does not mean that we should become global warming “deniers” who have no concern for the very real threat posed by global warming. It *does* mean, however, that it might be wise of us to shift our emphasis to the short run, with the hope that doing so will not only result in answers, but answers that have relevance for the long run. At any rate, I hope to be able to shift the direction of my own thinking in that direction, so that in future essays I will make fewer references to the threat of global warming.

At this point I have nothing to offer so far as an implementable sharing system is concerned, but would like to close this essay by briefly addressing some concerns of those who might question the *possibility* of developing such a system.

- “People are innately selfish; therefore, no implementable sharing system will ever be devised:

If people are today selfish, this reflects the fact that our society is structured in a manner such that selfish behavior is necessitated for success (and, conversely, those who become successful also tend to become more selfish than they were before). An abundance of research has been done—archeological, studies of “primitive” groups, primatological research, experimental research—which demonstrates that we are *not* “naturally” selfish. Charles Darwin, in his *The Origin of Species*, and specifically in defining “natural selection,” had argued that members of a species are naturally selfish, and are put into a competitive situation which causes them to be aggressive besides. But these conclusions on Darwin’s part were not based on firm empirical evidence—and Prince Peter Kropotkin “called” Darwin on the matter in the late 1800s.

If some “believe in” human selfishness on the basis of their observations of current behavior or their acceptance of Darwin’s thesis, others hold this belief because they are “possessed” by an ideology—such as *laissez-faire* “theory” or Social Darwinism.

- “People are not necessarily selfish, but because they feel insecure are reluctant to offer assistance to others.”

This claim undoubtedly has merit. However, what it suggests is that if we can remove this feeling from them—by giving them more actual security—they will lose this reluctance.

- “The poor are poor because they are lazy. Thus, they don’t *deserve* any help.”

In my recent “[A Farewell to Easter](#)” I noted that “my” congressman—Paul Ryan—had commented that government welfare programs lull people into dependency and a sense of complacency. Having myself been on “welfare” for a time, I can’t say that being on “welfare” had such an effect on me. I suspect, however, that despite the fact that government “welfare” provides one with the bare minimum for survival, some people may get used to welfare. Thus, I will concede the possibility that there is some truth in Congressman Ryan’s claim. However, whereas the conclusion that Ryan seemingly wants to make from this possibility is that governmental welfare should be ended, my conclusion is that able-bodied people who are out of work should be given an opportunity to *earn* an income, so that they can retain their self-respect.

- “Most people are not trustworthy. On the one hand, some claim to need help, but don’t actually. On the other hand, many who ask for donations, claiming that they will use those donations to help others, are lying—for they will keep the donations for themselves.”

Again, this is a claim with merit, but the suggestion is that we must work at creating a society within which people's trust will be justified.

- Etc. I'm sure that other claims could also be made, but because of the research findings that I alluded to (but did not cite) above, I have complete confidence that answers can be found. I don't know if I will be able to make any contribution in this direction, but intend at least to turn my attention to it. If someone else comes up with a great idea, I will embrace it, for what's important is not *who* develops such an idea but *that* it is developed.

Endnotes

1. "You've got to take a holt," as my dad used to put it. I'm not sure why he used "holt" rather than "hold," but suspect that the explanation lies in the fact that his ancestral home was the [Holt](#) area of Norway.
2. I learned recently that when my father's father's father's father (Torje Tjøstolsen) left the Tvedestrand area of Norway in 1852 (my great-grandfather Tjøstolv Torjesen having preceded him in 1848), he paid for the passage to America of about 60 people in addition to the members of his own family. I can only assume that it gave him great joy to use his resources for such a purpose. I know that I will never be able to be as generous as Torje—he set the bar much too high; I must simply use the abilities that I have as well as I can.
3. While taking a conservation course in college, from Jacob Shapiro—who taught the course as if he had just emerged from Hebrew Scripture.
4. "Ecotopia: A 'Gerendipitous' Scenario," *Transition: The Quarterly Journal of S.E.R.G.E.* (The Socially & Ecologically Responsible Geographers), Vol. 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 2 – 8.
5. In fact, we humans have basically the same biology now that we had 10,000 years ago.
6. For more on this concept see Chapter 2 in my [eBook](#), with Chapters 3 and 4 also being relevant.
7. "Global warming"—or, as some prefer, "climate change"—is a shorthand way of referring to a complex of atmospheric phenomena, including (a) a trend in increase in the global mean (i.e., average) temperature, (b) an increase in storminess, (c) an increase in the number of severe storms, and (d) increased variability in weather conditions at any given location (but some locations more than others)—so that the very concept of "climate" is becoming ever more meaningless.
8. How long this practice continued with Christians is not clear. [Tertullian](#) [c160 – c226] noted that the [Romans perceived](#) Christians to be loving, but the accuracy of that claim is not clear.

The Development of a Religion (please pardon the cynicism!)

Alton C. Thompson

Although from an historical perspective societal systems obviously change, and change significantly, three qualifications to this statement are in order. First, societal system change has been most notable since the Agricultural Revolution (of c 10,000 years ago)—since, that is, the rise of “civilization.” Second, “civilized” societies have always been hierarchical to varying degrees—meaning that elite dominance has always characterized “civilized” societies. Third, from a “slice of time” perspective, societal systems are rather rigid—and machine-like in their “operation.” To compare a societal system with a machine is appropriate *at this scale*, for both (a) consist of parts, which parts (b) “mesh”—i.e., work together in a harmonious manner.

Using the above perspective on societal systems, let us imagine a society that has been “working” smoothly for many years without interruption, and that during that period of time little, if any, societal system *change* has occurred. Let us also assume, however, that although harmony has prevailed during this period, below the surface of this observable harmony there has been a muted feeling of frustration on the part of some—the basis for this frustration being feelings of being treated unfairly, disrespectfully, etc. Thus, latent anger exists in the society despite the fact of outward calm and contentment.

Next, assume that some member of this society—either a discontented one, or someone who is not discontented, but is sensitive and perceptive enough to realize that *others* are discontented—arises as a “prophet”—as, that is, an individual who enters into the public arena and speaks to others about the injustice(s) that s/he perceives. This speaking may occur to large “assemblies,” to small groups, etc. But regardless of the size of the prophet’s audience, what this person does is to *articulate* what is on the minds of many in the society (those who feel that they are being mistreated in particular)—which has the effect of enabling those who are discontented to become more *conscious* of their discontent, and therefore now able to *voice* how they feel and think.

Because of this latter fact, such people now become a potential threat to the societal system; that is, potentially, they are “sand” that might get into the system’s gears, thereby causing it to stop functioning—or at least become very chaotic in its functioning. Given that the elite is dependent on continued smooth functioning of the societal system, these discontented ones have become a potential threat to the elite.

Assume further that the elite contains a few members who have both intelligence and cold water in their veins. They *perceive* the threat, and recognize that action must occur as soon as possible by members of the elite to stop the “movement” that is developing. They therefore convince the

society's leaders to arrest the prophet on somewhat plausible charges, find him guilty, and put him to death.

Such actions are therefore taken, which has the effect of ridding the society of this "pest;" however, members of the elite soon discover that those actions did not "kill" the *ideas* that the prophet had espoused. For those who had been inspired by his speeches make him into a martyr, and start a movement in his name—their purpose in so doing being to keep the prophet's "teachings" alive, to perpetuate them, and to develop "action plans" based on those ideas.

Members of the elite, in observing (with the help of spies) this occurring, quickly come to realize that they have failed in their efforts, and must therefore "come up" with a new approach. What they "hit" on is to engage in efforts to co-opt the movement that has arisen. This would involve *pretending* to embrace the prophet's message by creating a national religion ostensibly based on the prophet's ideas, while designing that religion carefully so that the prophet's ideas would become thoroughly domesticated, tamed, if not completely lost.

In creating a *national* religion there would, however, be a need to take into consideration that the national population varied considerably, so that different *varieties* of the religion would need to be created, doing so in such a way that a correlation would exist between the "variety set" and groupings within the national population. Especial care would need to be taken in creating a version for the discontented, and here the emphasis would be on:

- Getting members of that group to believe that their focus should be on the well-being of others, not themselves.
- Getting them to believe that their focus should simply be on "being good," and that no thought should be given to societal system change.
- To help them turn their attention from their own discontent, they should be promised a blissful afterlife—but only if they are "good."
- Related to this, they should be taught that insofar as they have needs, they should pray to have them fulfilled. This could be done either in private, or as a part of a "prayer meeting" in which those present state their needs, and a pastor then offers prayers on behalf of all of those who have stated needs.
- In addition, to help them turn their attention away from themselves, they should be encouraged to have meetings that would emphasize emotional release over thought—through singing, hand-clapping, an opportunity for "speaking in tongues," etc.
- The point should be made that it is necessary to *believe* certain things about, e.g., the prophet—which should help in shifting their attention away from the fact that the *prophet*

had emphasized *doing* over *believing*. For example, the idea could be conveyed that the prophet was not killed by evil people but, rather, had *planned* to die all along—and specifically had “died for our sins.”

Given that members of the elite would be willing to be participants in this charade, but would obviously need a much different variety of the religion, the religion designed for *them* would emphasize beliefs, but without any expectation that these beliefs should be given more than “lip service.” In addition, given that the prophet’s teachings had been written down, a book of those teachings would be prepared—one with an impressive appearance—and readings from this book would occur during meetings. The pastor would make some brief comments on those readings, but without any expectation that whatever teachings were read were to be given any serious attention. In fact, the readings selected might relate more to “historical” events than teachings, so that teachings could be avoided altogether. The purpose of these meetings for the elite would be simply to give the impression to members of the non-elite that members of the elite accepted the same religion as everyone else in the society—to give them a feeling of solidarity with members of the elite.

Whereas members of the discontented group would be expected to attend religious meetings on a regular basis—and even attend mid-week meetings—for members of the elite, attendance at *their* meetings would be regarded as optional; and when such people *did* attend a meeting, the purpose was not so much to attend the meeting *per se* as to socialize with other members of the elite *after* the meeting, and while socializing plan on how to further advance the interests of their class.

There would be various groups between these two extremes, the varieties created for them would feature different combinations of characteristics:

- Some would feature expensive, impressive buildings—i.e., “houses of worship.”
- Some would feature impressive furnishings and costumes worn by those officiating.
- Some would have large organs, and choirs directed by professionals.
- With some the emphasis would be on entertaining the “guests” and delivering humorous, uplifting messages.
- Other groups would de-emphasize “religious” meetings in favor of socialization after meetings, and at other times.
- Some groups would be organized on the basis of, e.g., nationality.
- Etc.

With some groups some of the members might display a sincere interest in the prophet's teachings, and this interest might be "fed" by creating "orders" within some of varieties, each "order" devoted to a certain "mission." This would serve at least three purposes:

- Those engaged in a given mission would be made to feel good about themselves for having done what they have done.
- Those served by the mission would likely have their well-being increased.
- By diverting those engaged in a mission from thoughts about societal system change the likelihood of the elite's loss of control would be reduced.
- Having a degree of variety *within* the group would enable the group to maximize its size, thereby contributing to the "clout" of the group's leaders—insofar as population size is correlated with the money at the leaders' disposal.

How to measure the success of this co-optation? If someone emerges in the society who tries to restore the teachings of the prophet, and that person is declared by most as a "heretic," the strategy can be said to have succeeded!

A Developmental Scenario

Alton C. Thompson

The scenario that I develop here stems from certain initial assumptions:

- The economy is an exchange one, with exchanges involving money (rather than barter).
- The economic organizations in the society are all small—ranging from members of a single family to members drawn from 100 families. The ownership characteristics of the organizations is herein deemed of little or no relevance.
- Although the members of the society vary in their characteristics (whether inherited, acquired, or a combination of both), household income varies little: the family with the most income has but three times the income of the poorest family.
- What everyone has in common, though, is a desire to become as happy as possible and a conviction that happiness comes from, and only from, the consumption of goods and services.
- Given that another common conviction is that goods-services must be acquired only via purchase (rather than thievery), associated with the desire to maximize happiness is a “drive” to acquire the highest income possible—so that one will be enabled to maximize one’s acquisition of goods and services.

Let us next assume that a given married adult—who plies some trade as his source of income—decides that he could increase his income by hiring several people, so that he could expand his production. Assume further that he decides to start by hiring 30 people to work for him. Furthermore, he decides that the activities associated with his trade fall rather neatly into three categories, and that nine people will be needed in each category. Last, he decides that each of the three work groups will need a supervisor, who will be responsible for overseeing the work of the group and acting as a conduit for messages that he wishes to pass along to the employees.

He makes a projection as to how much his employees should be able to produce in a year, how much his material costs will be, how much his advertising costs will be, etc. He also decides on a price for his product, such that price times the expected number of sales will give him a total revenue that will be as high as possible above his total costs—thereby maximizing his profit.

He has not yet settled on a wage rate for his employees, but knows that he will need to set it high enough to attract people as employees, while being as low as possible. He also knows that the supervisory positions—because of their added responsibility—will need to be compensated at a higher rate in order to attract people to those positions. He then uses the information that he has on hand (including guesses) and sets his wage rates—possibly setting a different rate for each of the three groups, and also possibly setting different salaries for the three supervisors. Finally, assume that he advertises for employees, has more applications than there are jobs available, and makes his employee selections.

That initial situation is not likely to remain static. For example, a given supervisor may claim that he needs more workers under him—presenting a plausible argument to the owner, but actually motivated by a desire to increase his own income: “The more people I have working for me, the higher my salary should be.”

Some employees may see that the only way they can increase their income is to become a supervisor. Therefore, they begin subtly to undermine their supervisor—e.g., by starting false rumors about him, doing what they can to prevent the supervisor from meeting his production quota, etc.—so that the supervisor will get fired, and they may then be able to take his place.

Another possibility is that as a given supervisor is nearing retirement, he brings a son into the business under him, and trains the son—with the idea that the son will take over for him when he retires.

Over time, then, the firm may grow in size, but not so much because production is growing but because supervisors are driven to increase their income. Also, the supervisory staff, which initially consisted of people with certain skills, becomes taken over by people who lack competence; they have gotten their positions because of “connections,” internal politics, etc.

Let us assume that although these things are occurring, the firm is, though, also increasing its sales, so that to produce more, it needs to hire more employees. As it grows in size, more and more “layers” will seemingly be required, along with more and more work groups. Regarding the latter, initially the owner may have also been the firm’s accountant; over time, however, at some point it will be necessary to establish an accounting group, with a supervisor. And as the firm grows still more, the accounting group will likely be divided into a series of subgroups, each with a supervisor, and with a manager over those supervisors.

As the firm grows in size, it will become more and more hierarchical as it continues to add layers. As this occurs, given that salaries will be positively correlated with “height” in the organization, income disparities will increase over time. And given that what has been

happening with this one firm has likely been repeated with other firms in the society, over time income disparities will become more and more notable in the society.

I have been assuming that the firm in question is a manufacturing one, but as our given area “develops,” there would be the development of other manufacturing firms, retailing and wholesaling firms, transport firms, insurance firms, banking firms, etc. That is, the economy would become ever more diverse. An educational system would develop, but, of course, be more oriented to training than to education. Religions would develop, and in doing so would be oriented to the social classes that were emerging, and the needs of people as they related to social class (with, e.g., those oriented to “lowers” promising happiness in an afterlife at least, those oriented to “highers” emphasizing ritual and belief, and providing opportunities for members of the class to mingle with their “own kind,” etc.). Professional sports would develop, and serve two purposes: providing a diversion from one’s everyday life, and reinforcing the “fact” that we humans are born to be competitive—so that “lowers” should resign themselves to the fact that they are poor because they deserve to be, and “uppers” can feel that they are where they are because of their superior merit. Cultural developments would also occur, primarily for the benefit of “uppers”—giving them something to do outside of work. Etc.

Let us now focus on a particular point in time some time after the initial period, and assume that a Prophet enters the area, and begins exhorting the citizens of the given society that their belief that happiness comes from consumption is simply wrong, and that instead it comes from “doing” for others (shades of [*If Christ Came to Chicago*](#)). The question that arises is: What will the response be? Will the response be similar regardless of income, or will it vary with income? Will the response vary with age and/or sex, and if so, how?

In commenting on this, I would start with the assumption that everyone in the society has a way of life that differs from “design specifications” for humans (see Chapter 2 of my [eBook](#)). The “lowers” in the society will be suffering more from this than the “uppers,” because their basic needs are not being met well, and they have to live with the sense that they are inferior, and that there’s little if anything that they can do to decrease that degree of inferiority. “Uppers” will have their *physical* needs met, but will not necessarily have their *psychological* needs met well. Some will have adapted well to their position in the society from a psychological standpoint, but their bodies will still be subject to the stresses that their position places on them—so that their physical health may suffer. And even though they may not be stressed, they may have an unhealthy diet and may not engage in enough physical exercise to maintain good health.

Would the above facts have any relevance for how they react to the messages of the Prophet? The “uppers” are likely to respond that they are, in fact, living the good life, and that developing a “giving” orientation would not contribute to their happiness. They might add that if they were

to give to others, they would have less to spend on themselves, so that their happiness would decline. And they might also argue that in this society everyone receives what they deserve, so that the poor are in fact receiving what *they* deserve—so that the very health of the societal system might be disturbed if one were to “interfere” with the situation by giving to the (undeserving) poor. The “lowers” in the society would likely agree that the Prophet’s message was a good one, but they would point out that they could hardly meet their own needs—so that the Prophet’s message applied to “uppers,” not to them (the “lowers”).

“Uppers” in hearing the message might experience some pangs of guilt—given that humans are “born to be good.” And although some uppers might actually heed the message and begin changing their behavior, I would expect that most uppers would be able to ignore any feelings of guilt that they might have.

It would seem, then, that the hierarchical structure of the society forms a solid barrier to any “outbreak” of good behavior. Given that, I don’t see any way of getting good behavior while keeping the hierarchy, I conclude that such behavior can become commonplace only if the hierarchy “goes.” In fact, if that occurs, it’s conceivable that the needs of all will be met without any need for anyone “doing good.”

If conclude, then, that if our goal is for people to be empathetic relative to others, and to treat one another well, this goal cannot be accomplished if the society remains as a hierarchical one. On the other hand, however, a *non*-hierarchical society will not *automatically* have the “people characteristics” that we would like to see in a society: These must be worked for, and the “big question” is, “Doing *what*, specifically?”

Animal “Moral” Behavior: Some Random Thoughts

Alton C. Thompson

If moral-like behavior is observed with a given animal, the first fact to keep in mind is that behavior that one perceives as “moral-like” reflects *one’s own* concept of “moral” behavior. However, one should not assume that the concept that one holds of “moral” behavior is totally *independent* of the behavior that one is observing in the animal. That is, one should not assume that one’s own concept of “moral” behavior is part of a rationally-created system that is totally independent of the behavior that one observes in the animal. It is rational to believe that one’s concept of what is “moral” is an *elaboration* and *systemization* of the behavior that one is observing, but given our evolutionary origin, it is a mistake to assume that our system of morality has no basis whatsoever in animal behavior—for the fact of the matter is that *that’s* precisely what *is* the basis of our moral system.

I need to qualify this immediately, however, by specifying that in referring to “our” moral system, I am referring to the moral system evident in the “higher” passages of the Christian Bible. I am *not* referring to the moral system associated with, e.g., the [Vikings](#) or pre-Islamic Arab nomads. I assume that the latter two moral systems (which share many similarities) were developed in the context of the ways of life of those who had them, meaning that a “fit” developed between the *way of life* that they developed and the *moral system* associated with the people living that way of life. What this “fit” may have meant is that the way of life, to be sustained, *required* a certain moral system, so that the moral system developed in a way to facilitate that way of life. In short, the way of life *shaped* the moral system, and the moral system helped *sustain* that way of life; it was *not*, however, the cause of that way of life developing in the first place.

What the above discussion suggests is that the moral system that *we* prize should not be regarded as having universality but, rather, should be thought of as one that fit a certain way of life. Not necessarily the way of life that we have right *now*, but a way of life that our *ancestors* had. At the moment I’m not sure what, exactly, this may mean, but will let my subconscious work on it for an answer.

Let me now move into another subject that I believe has relevance for understanding what we perceive as “moral” behavior (i.e., notions that have a Biblical basis), and that is: Given that one observes moral-like behavior in an animal, how might one *explain* that behavior? Let me list some possibilities:

1. The behavior is purely *instinctual*—involving no “thought,” “emotion,” etc.

2. The behavior has been *learned*—e.g., by observing it in another member of the same species, and engaged in as a matter of habit.
3. Engaging in the behavior results in a pleasurable feeling; the animal in question “recognizes” this fact, and remembers it, and in observing a future situation where moral-like behavior is called for, engages in such behavior. Thus, a “selfish” motive is involved in causing the behavior, not a feeling of empathy/sympathy for the individual toward which the moral-like behavior is directed.
4. One observes that another is experiencing pain (indicated, e.g., by facial expressions) and oneself “feels” that pain. To reduce that feeling in oneself, one offers help to the one in pain. One thereby reduces that feeling in the other—and in oneself as well. Note that with (3) above one engages in helping behavior to *increase* one’s pleasure, but in this case one does so to *reduce* one’s feeling of pain. In both cases emotion—feeling—is involved, *anticipated* feeling in the one case, *current* feeling in the other. Given this, I think there is reason to regard the former as “higher” than the second, and that therefore one is justified in thinking that it developed *after* the other.
5. Perhaps in some cases one can infer that the moral-like behavior observed has resulted from a feeling of *pity*, an “understanding” of *what* needs to be done to help another (i.e., a decision-making process), and then action taken on the decision made. In this case, although there was (one infers) a feeling of pity, acting on that feeling may neither increase one’s pleasure nor decrease one’s pain; no sense of pain motivated the actions in the first place, and performing the action does not necessarily bring a sense of pleasure. Rather, it may simply bring one the sense that one has done the “right” thing! That is, perhaps in some cases one can infer that an animal’s behavior has been motivated by a tacitly-held moral code!

Note, regarding the above, that one can conceive a certain order of development: 1, 2, 4, 3, and finally 5. That is, behavior 1 appeared on the scene first, 5 most recently. But there is another “dimension” here between the *temporal* one, and that is the *spatial* one: Within a given group at a given point in time, one can assume that different individuals will be at different “stages.” Insofar as this is the case, would one expect it to be correlated with *intelligence*? That is, do those with the best perceptions, best understandings, and greatest ability to make decisions, etc., tend to be those with the highest moral sense? Do they not only *themselves* act on that moral sense, but also *vocalize* it—so that they express, to others in their group, the “shoulds” that they perceive? Before this occurs, must a certain level of communication ability be achieved? (The earliest communication was by noises, gestures, and facial expressions; although the last two don’t seem to get elaborated, noises “evolve” into language, and language increases in

complexity—eventually adding the written word to the spoken word. And much later, the spoken word is aided by the telephone, by radio, by television, by the cell phone, etc.)

I suspect that if we can gain an understanding (i.e., explanation for) moral-like behavior in animals, this knowledge will help us understand the basis for the moral system that most of us accept—i.e., the Biblically-based one, not the “pecuniary” one that [Thorstein Veblen](#) [1857 – 1929] referred to in many of his works. However, I’m also convinced that such understanding will not in itself explain our moral system—that The Discrepancy (see Chapter 2 of my [eBook](#)) will also need to be brought in.

We also need to recognize that our moral system has “evolved” over time—initially focusing on identifying “bad” actions, then adding “good” ones, and desirable societal situations, how one should treat animals, how one should be protective of natural features, etc. Thus, another facet of our moral system is to describe, and then explain, how it has “evolved” over time.

Another question that arises (given that the concept of “fair play” seems to be present in some animals) is: What explanation can be offered for why some animals engage in play? And: What role does play have in affecting other behaviors—including moral-like ones—engaged in by animals?

Given (a) empathy, (b) sympathy, (c) compassion and (d) pity: How should one distinguish one from another? In what chronological order did they appear—and why?

To “feel the pain” of another, one must be aware enough of one’s self that one knows the sorts of facial expressions, etc., that one “performs” in feeling a certain emotion. When one observes another with a certain facial expression and/or engaging in certain behaviors, this may not affect one’s own emotions at all, may make one feel happy, or may make one “feel the pain” of the other—it all depends on the facial expressions/behaviors involved. The only emotion that may cause one to, oneself, engage in any sort of behavior (i.e., action) is one where one “feels the pain” of another; and in this case one will tend to feel compelled to do something to reduce that person’s pain.

That is, to reduce *one’s own* feeling of pain, one acts to reduce the pain of the other: One is “programmed,” first, to feel the other’s pain, and the reason one is, is so that one will act to help the other. Nature has “tricked” one into engaging in a “selfish” act that, although having the *direct* purpose of being selfish, has the *ultimate* purpose of helping the one feeling (one infers) pain.

The rationale (i.e., proposed explanation) for this occurring is that an individual has the best chance of surviving if s/he lives in a group; those groups tend to survive whose members have become “programmed” to act in this way. It may be an accidental thing if one became “programmed” in a certain way; but if one *is* so programmed, and lives in a group wherein many of the others are also so programmed, one will tend to survive—and reproduce. And if some members of the group are *not* so programmed, they will be pressured to *learn* to behave as if they are programmed in the same way as the programmed ones are. Thus, the behaviors of the individuals in a given group can be of a mixed nature—with the behaviors of some being *programmed*, the behaviors of others being *learned*.

The development of morality and moral systems with humans raises, then, some interesting and important questions—and it appears essential to use an evolutionary perspective, rather than a theological one, in answering those questions.

Putting Keltner's Ideas into a Developmental Scenario

Alton C. Thompson

My object here is to develop a scenario that “explains” the development of human traits discussed by Dacher Keltner [1]: Kindness, embarrassment, smile, laughter, tease, touch, love, compassion, awe. In the following I have been able to mention them all, except for embarrassment, but in several cases was not able to identify the specific mechanism involved. Perhaps I will be able to do so later. When, during the course of the presentation, it becomes appropriate to mention one of above nine traits, I bold it and put it in **ALL CAPS**.

The above nine topics form chapter headings in Keltner's book. However, a major problem of the book is its lack of coherence—i.e., Keltner does not tie the topics together, except incidentally; and especially does he fail to tie them together in developmental terms. Thus, what I wish to do here is create a scenario of human development that works all nine topics into it in a plausible way. My starting point is our “ancestors,” without specifying a name for them or the distance in the past of my starting point. My objective here is not so much to provide an accurate history as to give the above nine topics some degree of coherence.

I need to state at the outset that although various selection mechanisms have played a role in human evolution (e.g., accidents, diseases, natural disasters), “natural selection,” as conceived by Charles Darwin, played *no role whatsoever*. Rather, the factors that played the major role in human evolution were (1) environmental change, (2) predation, and (3) sexual selection; and the discussion below focuses just on the latter two. In addition, I need to emphasize that an individual with given genes will not *thereby* develop having certain characteristics: The nature of one's upbringing also plays a huge role (as the case of “[feral](#)” humans indicates).

I begin by assuming that the “ancestor” in question is a mammal (of course!), meaning that the young, to survive, need a period of weaning on mother's milk before they will be able to fend for themselves. I also assume that virtually all mothers have a genetic proclivity to provide that necessary care to their young. There may be exceptions, but those exceptions have no descendants—and thus are of no interest for the present discussion.

I also assume the existence of two sexes, with members of each equipped with a sex drive. With males I assume that this drive is continual, with females it is strongest during that short period during the month when she is fertile. I assume that female-choice sexual selection occurred at this time, but that females were not particularly selective in choosing which males to mate with; whatever criteria were used had little in the way of survival value for themselves or their young.

I assume that the ancestor is subject to predation, so that survivors will tend to have certain characteristics in particular: An ability to sense the near presence of predators (see, hear, smell); quick reactions, so that when a predator is sensed, a reaction occurs virtually immediately; given that I assume the ancestor to be a “[flight](#)” creature, I assume that speed and agility will help the individual survive; I assume that the ancestor had recently emerged from the trees (i.e., formerly was a tree dweller), and that initially an ability to climb trees was an aid to survival; finally, I assume that intelligence was a factor that aided survival—in that it enabled the individual to know where predators might be present, so that such areas could be avoided; it enabled the individual to determine beforehand what it would do if it sensed the presence of a predator;. etc.

I assume that over time intelligence grew in importance as a survival tool—in part because the other factors had reached their limit in development, leaving only intelligence to develop further. The more intelligent the female, the greater her prospects of surviving; and as her intelligence increased, she began more and more to choose to mate mainly with that male she perceived as most intelligent. As a result, the offspring born tended to have high intelligence, so that a tendency for increasing intelligence for the species became apparent.

As this was occurring, a point was reached where increasing head size (to accommodate the increased brain size) necessitated births that were more and more premature. Given that most mothers had an inborn proclivity to care for their young, mothers now had a longer period of time that needed to be used to provide that care. This presented two problems to her: It was now more difficult for her to engage in the gathering (for sustenance) that she needed to engage in; it made it more difficult to protect herself and her young from predators. (Usually, she would have just one child at a time, but multiple births would occur on occasion.)

These facts made her more fussy in her choice of whom to mate with; thus, that male that exhibited a willingness to provide her with food and protection from predators became preferred for mating purposes. Some of these males “found” that their provision of such help—such **KINDNESS**—“magically” added to their own sense of well-being, so that sensing this, they were motivated—for “selfish” reasons—to continue providing such help. This not only enabled them to satisfy their sexual drive (necessary for the continuation of the species), but enabled them—through their helping behavior—to feel good. (Note that in *being* good they felt “good”! [2]) That is, in *doing* good, certain physiological processes are automatically activated which result in one *feeling* “good.” Indeed, this feeling may be stronger in the giver than the givee! And with growing intelligence, the sexual act tended to become less and less a mechanical matter—an activity that resulted from a drive—than an activity that produced an intense feeling of pleasure; thus developed the feeling of **LOVE**, which feeling helped bind a man to a woman more strongly than it had before. (But what was the specific mechanism that led to this development?)

The males referred to in the above paragraph not only engaged in certain activities, but become members of the group. The initial group consisted of mother and child (or children, if multiple births). The group then expanded by the female children remaining with the mother while the male children left the “nest” to fend for themselves—perhaps joining a group of other males. At a still later point an adult male joined the group, providing food and protection to group members. And other adult males may have joined the group to pair-bond with the female children, now mature—all of these adult males having been selected for inclusion in the group by the adult females already present. They did not select themselves: Thus, although the group may have a harem-like appearance, it is not that at all.

As the group grew in size, and acquired more male adult members, there would likely be some conflict among these males. The interaction that occurred might involve some aggression, but would more likely be of a playful nature, such that any given male soon learned his position in this hierarchy. The lower-ranking males tended to develop the **SMILE** as a way of signaling that they “recognized” their position; this becomes “hardwired” in them, but it is by no means clear *how* this occurred.

The group would have plenty of “free” time—for acquiring the necessary food for sustenance wouldn’t take much of their time, and one activity engaged in during this time would be communicating with others in the group. This could involve recounting past events, planning future behaviors (especially having a sustenance purpose), preparing for future behaviors, etc. Perhaps the recounting of past events especially lent itself to bringing in humorous twists, which caused **LAUGHTER**. (But *how* did this response become hardwired in them?) And the laughter resulted in involuntary physiological responses that made members of the group feel “good”—and thereby feel connected to other members. That is, laughing, resulted in a general feeling of *solidarity*—an in-group feeling. Also, free time was used for playing—this probably most common with the younger members of the group; and this helped build feelings of solidarity with *them*. The playing likely involved both **TEASING** and **TOUCHING**, which activities further contributed to “good” feelings and a sense of solidarity.

At some point intelligence would have developed to a point where individuals were capable of having a feeling of **AWE**—and *did*, especially in viewing certain sights in nature: A vista, a certain behavior in animals that was repeated on a seasonal basis, etc.

The “good” feeling that resulted in engaging in helping behavior had a corollary: When one observed another (even a member of another species) in pain, one could *oneself* feel that pain (“mirroring”). To reduce that feeling of pain, one felt impelled to do what one could to reduce the pain in the other. (But *how* did this reaction arise?! By what mechanism did it arise?) What I am referring to here is a feeling of empathy, or **COMPASSION**. And this feeling, combined with the use of one’s intellect, “caused” one to feel sympathy in cases where one *learned* about pain in others, but was not *observing* it.

Notes:

1. Dacher Keltner, *Born to be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.
2. Related to this point, if one learns (e.g., hears or reads) about someone doing good deeds, one will oneself—if a normal person—feel “good.” In fact, one will feel “good” even if the good is done by an animal—as the case of [Jasmine](#) indicates.

[April 23, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/04/23/moral-judgment-variation/>]

Moral Judgment Variation

Alton C. Thompson

Cliff Schechter,[1] in his "[Washington's Three Ring-Circus](#)" (August 9, 2011), stated:

There are varying theories for why President Obama always punts on first down and negotiates by handing the opposition a paddle and saying, "Thank you sir, may I have another?" But any one of them is predicated on weakness, a man too feeble to stand up to Republicans and official Washington and do what he believes. Either that, or he is too weak of character to digest the fact that cutting taxes for billionaires while cutting Social Security cost-of-living increases for impoverished seniors is not what one might call a "moral" decision.

My focus here will not be on Schechter's views regarding Pres. Obama (with which I largely agree), but his reference to "moral" decisions. The points that I want to develop here are that (a) the question of *how* "moral" a given decision is often a matter of *opinion*—some sincere individuals think of a given decision as "moral," other sincere individuals "immoral;" (b) individuals vary in the *sorts* of decisions that they make—from a "level" standpoint as well as other standpoints—and judgments of the "morality" of a given individual's decisions may vary with, e.g., the "level" of the decision in question; (c) rather than thinking of the "morality" of decisions in dichotomous (i.e., either-or) terms, it may be more realistic to think of a *morality continuum*. Even then, of course, where one individual places a given decision on the continuum will not necessarily coincide with another's placement on that same continuum.

A key fact of importance for this discussion is that decisions can vary enormously in their *motivations* as well as their *consequences*. For example, in the killing of a given person, there can be (a) the killing of another in a "fit" of anger, a (b) "cold-blooded" killing of another, (c) the execution of a prisoner (following lawful procedures) by officials of a given state, (d) the execution of a prisoner who has surrendered during a war, (e) a soldier's killing of an enemy combatant during a war, (f) a soldier's killing of a civilian during a war, (g) etc.

In the "*simultaneous*" killing of a number of others, there are the cases of (a) the killings, several months back, of youth and others in Norway, (b) Pres. Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on two of Japan's cities near the end of World War II, (c) Nazi killings of numerous Jews, gypsies, etc. during World War II, (d) the "collateral" damage caused by rocket firings, by U. S. troops, in Afghanistan. *Such mass* killings varied in the numbers involved, in the motivations involved, perhaps in the "justification" involved, etc.

From a morality standpoint, there are likely to be variations in opinions as to which, if any, of the above actions was "moral," or (if the matter of *degree* is involved) the *degree* to which a given

action was “justified.” When a nation declares war, the citizens of the nation (many of them, at any rate) seem to believe that the war itself is justified, so that the killing “necessarily” involved is also justified; and that given that the soldiers involved often have been drafted, no given soldier should either (a) feel guilty about the killing s/he does during war engagements, nor (b) should “outsiders” place any blame on soldiers who kill during military engagements. There may be isolated cases where a soldier’s killing may be judged “unwarranted,” so that s/he should be held accountable for his/her killing. But most of the onus of war-time killing rightly falls on those whose decision-making led to the war in the first place.

Actually, regarding this latter matter, on the one hand there is the judgment of whether the leader’s decision to go to war was justified, and, at a lower level, there are judgments of generals/military planners regarding their *specific plans* and *how* they were carried out.

Any decision that one makes—except perhaps decisions of a “spur of the moment” variety—involves (a) certain assumed facts, used (b) in conjunction with one’s value system. Were we to imagine two different individuals placed in the exact same situation, there is no reason to expect that they would make the same decision, or set of decisions—because (a) the “facts” assumed as true by the one person would not necessarily coincide with those of the second person; and (b) the value system of the one might be expected to differ from that of another person. In fact, even if two individuals have the same set of values, each might “order” his/her values differently (as to *importance*), and for that reason alone, each might make a different decision if in an identical situation.

The members of a given society would be expected to share a common value system in certain respects, but different groups in the society might each have their own value system. For example, [Thorstein Veblen](#) [1857 – 1929] referred to “industrial” and “pecuniary” modes of thought within our society, which modes (both primarily of an *economic* nature) are basically contradictory. Other groups surely exist in the society, each with its own value system, such groups based on ethnicity, length of residence in the country, religion, age, section of the country, social class, level of education, etc. Thus, depending on the “dimension” in question, there may be considerable variation in a given society, or very little.

Besides value system differences within a society, perhaps of more significance is variation in what people believe to be the *relevant facts*. If one gets one’s “facts” from personal observation, there can still be variations in the “facts”—indicated by eyewitness accounts that differ one from another. And if one gets one’s “knowledge” from the press, one’s “knowledge” will vary depending on whether one uses Fox News, MSNBC, CommonDreams, Truth-Out, etc.

If one disagrees with the decisions made by another (e.g., ones made by Pres. Obama), the problem is that one usually is not privy to the other’s *basis* for making the decision. One may *believe* that the other has the same value system as oneself, so that there should be no basis for

disagreement. But such an assumption is flawed in that (a) its assumption of a commonality in value system may be based more on wishful thinking than actuality, and (b) the “facts” possessed by the other may differ from one’s own facts, without one really knowing what the other’s “facts” were (for those “facts” may have resulted from some secret process, with the results not being publicized).

The “moral” of this discussion of morality is that although we are often tempted to question the decisions of others on moral grounds, we usually do that questioning on the basis a lack of knowledge of the other’s basis for his or her decision. Even if one shares the values of another, one may question another’s decisions under the *assumption* that you both possess the same set of “facts,” when the truth of the matter is that you each possess a *different* set of “facts”—with the other’s being more accurate. But how is one to know this, given that one is not privy to the other’s “facts”?

Given that one can never know the “factual” basis of another’s decisions, and therefore cannot know the accuracy level of those “facts,” one should be cautious in one’s accusations (which, by their very nature, involve moral judgments). One cannot expect the politicians in our midst to follow this “rule,” but—fortunately—the number of politicians in our midst is limited. (The problem, however, is that too many of them are under the control of [ALEC](#)—the American Legislative Exchange Council—and other wealthy right-wing organizations.)

Note

1. “Cliff Schechter is the president of Libertas, LLC, a progressive public relations firm. He is the author of the 2008 bestseller “[The Real McCain](#)” and is a regular contributor to *The Huffington Post*. Follow Cliff on Twitter: [@Cliffschechter](#).”

Understanding Christianity's Trajectory [1]

Alton C. Thompson

It is sometimes [said](#) that the religion *of* Jesus became, with Christianity, (merely) a religion *about* Jesus—so that Christianity utterly distorts the “ministry” of Jesus. Insofar as that observation is correct (which it *is*, substantially!), it raises at least two questions:

- Did Christianity *inevitably* develop in this manner?—as I may seem to have suggested in a recent [essay](#); or
- Did an *event* occur—one that did not *have* to occur, but *did* anyway—which set off a chain of other events that eventuated in Christianity becoming ever more a religion *about*, than *of*, Jesus? A transformation that occurred rather rapidly, in fact?

In this essay I argue for the second possibility, and in doing so find that I offer an explanation not only of why *Christianity* developed as it did, but why the [gospels](#)—including the canonical ones—are a mixture of the plausible and the fantastic.

Any reader of the gospels will encounter both the believable and the unbelievable. The modern reader, however, tends to “passover” the latter precisely because of its fantastic quality, and pay attention only to the plausible. What the modern reader tends to perceive as “plausible” in the gospels—whether or not canonical—is that which *resonates* with him or her—including teachings (including those embodied in parables and stories) regarding how one should relate to others, wisdom statements, etc.

If, while reading fantastic elements in the gospels, one (subconsciously) asks oneself *why* those elements are present, one is likely to answer: “This was spoken (then written) during a prescientific age, when much of what people believed was simply baseless.” Interestingly, however, one tends not to *use* that material to help one explain, e.g., Christianity’s development. In this essay, however, I do precisely that—and in the process comment on the mixture of “fact and fantasy” that one finds in the gospels.

In an [earlier essay](#) I had noted that I had long thought that the early Christians had borrowed the idea of “resurrection” from the [Mystery religions](#) that were popular in the Mediterranean Basin 2,000 years ago, but that such a belief had a problem: In the Mysteries (reflecting, as they did, the vegetation cycle), the birth of the god occurred in the spring, and the god’s death occurred in the fall; with Christianity, however, the birth occurred in the dead of winter, and the death in the spring.[2] Being perplexed by this lack of correlation, I sent an email to noted scholar of early

Christianity Bart D. Ehrman (at my *alma mater*, the University of North Carolina), and his response was as follows:

“I don’t think pagan fertility cults really had much of anything to do with ideas of Jesus’['] resurrection. I talk about this a bit in a book coming out next week, called *Did Jesus Exist*. Specifically, I think [that] the disciples were already Jewish apocalypticists who subscribed to the idea of ‘resurrection’ (unlike pagans); my guess is that soon after Jesus’[s] death (a week or two later?) one or more of his disciples had a vision (or dream interpreted as a vision?) of Jesus (much as my grandfather ‘saw’ my grandmother a couple of weeks after her funeral) and interpreted that as meaning that Jesus was still alive. And still alive, for a Jewish apocalypticist, meant raised from the dead. So the resurrection has started, and will be completed soon. Maybe next week.”

I found Dr. Ehrman’s argument convincing, and so stated in the earlier essay.

While reflecting recently Ehrman’s explanation for how the resurrection concept entered the early Jesus movement, the following developmental scenario occurred to me:

After Jesus’s death (by crucifixion, by the Romans), his followers may have been in varying degrees of confusion as to what to do next. However, “soon after Jesus’[s] death (a week or two later?) one or more of his disciples had a vision (or dream interpreted as a vision?) of Jesus,” and interpreted this dream/vision as meaning that Jesus was still alive. Rumors began to spread to this effect, and became elaborated[3]. That is, the early followers began to think of Jesus more and more as a special person—which for Jews of the time, meant thinking of him as the [Messiah](#).

Now that they were beginning to perceive Jesus differently than they had before, they began to not only *remember* stories about him, but to *invent* such stories—being partially guided here by Hebrew Scripture (i.e., finding passages that “predicted” him”). Thus, they invented stories about his birth, his early years, John the Baptizer’s baptism of him (perhaps), and some of his actions[4]; they perhaps invented parables which they put in his mouth, invented post-“resurrection” appearances, etc. For example, the following passage ([Luke 24:36 – 49](#)) I read not only as pure fiction, but as an excellent example of pure fiction:

36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything

here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

My point here is that as the early followers turned their attention more and more to Jesus as a *being*—more and more as a *divine* being, indeed—they were increasingly *de*-emphasizing what Jesus had been “about”—i.e., a person who had taught them (using various means) how they should live their lives—or, as he would have phrased it, how *God* wanted them to live their lives.

Although they may not have been intending this, the Jesus that they were creating came more and more to resemble a [savior](#) of the Mysteries. With a difference, however: *This* savior was being thought of as having been a *real person* (actually, a divinity in disguise). Thus, a Jew of the [diaspora](#), such as [Paul of Tarsus](#) (that city in what is now Turkey), in preaching this Jesus to “[gentiles](#)” in the Mediterranean Basin, could be understood by those to whom he was speaking, with some of them becoming converts to the newly-emerging religion.

This new religion retained an ethical component (i.e., the teachings attributed to Jesus), but more and more the religion became oriented to “facts” about Jesus, and even an insistence on *correct* facts about Jesus—i.e., orthodoxy. In addition (and perhaps especially after [Constantine](#)’s [272 – 337 CE] reign), *ritual* became ever more important with the religion, and *governance* came more and more to resemble that of the Roman Empire. In short, Christianity became more and more merely *about* Jesus, and Jesus’s teachings faded into the background more and more. As this was occurring, the religion became a useful tool of the elite for controlling the non-elite.[5]

But not only did the Movement change greatly in character over time. The books that came to be written about Jesus (in Greek mainly) contained elements that were of varying degrees of veracity. This fact may not have been noticed overly much by those in the Movement centuries ago (although educated “pagans” who became familiar with early Movement writings were of a different opinion [6]), but scholars, over the past few centuries, have produced mounds of literature attempting to separate the true from the fictional.

Endnotes

1. The hypothesis that I present herein is somewhat related to the thesis developed by Barrie Wilson in his *How Jesus Became Christian*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008. [Publisher's Weekly](#) (per the Amazon site) states, regarding the book, that "Wilson calls his argument the Jesus Cover-Up Thesis and claims that the religion of Paul displaced the teachings of Jesus so that Paul's preaching about a divine gentile Christ covered up the human Jewish Jesus."
2. Except that, given that the resurrection also occurred in the spring, one might say that a "second birth" occurred in the spring.
3. Remember a game that we used to play, called "the telephone game," [Chinese whispers](#), etc.?
4. The beautiful story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery ([John 8:3 – 11](#)) is regarded as a later interpolation, thus may be a story that not only lacked "Old Testament" roots, but was otherwise fictional. It does, however, make for a good story!
5. Even as Christianity became less monolithic after the [Protestant Reformation](#) (beginning in the 16th century), the fact that the new denominations that emerged tended to reflect nationality and social class groups made the New Christianity even more useful to the elite.
6. See, e.g. Francis G. Fletcher's [Conversion and Reaction](#), and Bart D. Ehrman, [Forged](#), 2011.

[Even though I have not read the book, I perhaps should have made reference to John Dominic Crossan's *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus*, 2012.]

Appendix

After Jesus's death, then, rather than his teachings being *continued*, even *further developed*, his earliest followers—perhaps prompted by stories that he was still alive (“resurrected”)—began *remembering* events in Jesus's life, and also *inventing* such events. More and more, as a consequence, the Movement became focused on “facts” regarding Jesus, so that the orientation came to be on *beliefs*—indeed, *correct* beliefs (i.e., *orthodoxy*)—about Jesus at the expense of *orthopraxy* (i.e., correct *behavior*).

Of “facts” that were invented, three became of especial importance for the Christian movement:

- Christ—a [title](#) given to Jesus—died (on a cross, by [crucifixion](#)), and did so for our sins.
- However, Christ was resurrected; and then, at a later point,
- Christ ascended to Heaven.

I have already commented on the second point, arguing that *belief* in this event set in motion the development of an increased orientation to story remembering/creation, the result being the development of a *belief system*—actually, a series of belief systems, especially after the Protestant movement of the 16th century. In this Appendix I discuss the first of these important beliefs—that Jesus not only died on a cross, and did so “for our sins.”

That Jesus died on a cross is not in question here: Given that the execution of Jesus was accomplished by the Romans (who were then occupying Palestine), this was a [method of execution](#) that they often used. But was Jesus crucified *for* “our” sins?—a claim that has its Biblical basis, e.g., in [Paul's statement](#) (Romans 5:8): “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

When we moderns think of “dying for,” we usually think of dying for a *cause*. That is, we think of someone like Martin Luther King, Jr., as being so convinced of the “rightness” (even “righteousness”) of his cause, that s/he will pursue it vigorously—so vigorously that those who object to the cause will do all in their power to extinguish the cause, even to the point of killing its leader. The person pursuing the cause may know that it is dangerous for him/her to do so—and especially doing so in a vigorous manner—but may be so convinced of the cause's “rightness” that s/he pursues the cause anyway. And may very well, then, be killed by those who oppose him/her.

Some modern scholars think of Jesus in this way—e.g., Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan (authors of *The Last Week*, 2006) [argue](#) that Jesus “gave his life as a means of liberation from bondage.” But most Christians seem to want to explain Jesus’s crucifixion not in *causal* terms (e.g., that he had irritated the Jewish leaders, who then got the Roman leaders to do their “dirty work”) but as the result of an (a) *intended* act of (b) sacrifice (“for our sins”).

The subject of “[sacrifice](#)” is part of the larger topic of *offerings*, a topic dealt with succinctly in a chart on [this site](#). This chart identifies five types of offering—burnt, grain, peace, sin, and trespass—and indicates for each (a) the elements associated with it, (b) its purpose, (c) God’s portion, (d) priest’s portion, and offerer’s portion. Under “elements” the chart indicates that for all offering except the grain offering, animal *sacrifice* was involved.

Is it, however, reasonable—from a Jewish standpoint—to think of Jesus’s death on the cross as a *sacrifice*? When Paul stated that “Christ died for us” (see above), he implied that Jesus’s death was of a *sacrificial* nature—i.e., that it functioned to [atone](#) for “our” sins. That Paul thought of Jesus’s death as a sacrifice, but recognized that such a conclusion was unacceptable to Jews, however, is indicated by his statement ([I Corinthians 1:23](#)) that “we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. . . .”

Why would this assertion be a “stumbling block” to Jews? In the first place, Jewish sacrifices often involved animals but never humans (see chart referred to above). Indeed, in [Deuteronomy 12:31](#) the Jews are enjoined *not* to sacrifice humans. Second, given that ([Deuteronomy 21:23](#)) “anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse,” and that Jesus had been, in a sense, “hung on a pole,” Jews had reason to think of the crucified Jesus as *cursed* by God, thus unworthy of worship.

In addition, to think of Jesus’s death as having been not only a sacrifice, but one having the function of atoning for our sins, would put him in a strange relationship with John the Baptizer. John had initiated a “ministry” of baptism that involved submersing people in the Jordan River. One’s entering the water to be baptized by John could be thought of as involving, symbolically, a washing away of one’s sins (and those being baptized may have perceived this action as symbolically involving this), with the baptism itself involving a sort of drowning—representing a “killing” of one’s old (sinful) self—and one’s reappearance out of the water as representing a new birth—a “born again” experience. Thus, one chose to be baptized because one wished, on the one hand, to be relieved of feelings of guilt, but also, on the other hand, to affirm—in the presence of others—that one resolved, henceforth, to strive to live a sinless life.

The important thing to note about John’s “ministry” is that he was in effect assuming a *priestly* role in that he was offering baptism as a *substitute for sacrifice*. That is, *his baptism had*

basically the same function as animal sacrifice. There is no evidence that he explicitly *claimed* this, nor is there evidence that he advocated that one *not* engage in sacrifice. The perceptive Jew of his time, however, would have recognized this about John's "ministry."

The gospel of [Mark](#) begins (v. 9) with John the Baptizer baptizing Jesus, which raises the question: Why would Jesus have consented to be baptized by John? This question is puzzling to those who believe that Jesus was a divine being (the very Son of God, in fact), but if we adopt the more reasonable view that Jesus was a flesh-and-blood human man, and recognize the possibility that John and Jesus were cousins (suggested in [Luke 1:36](#)), this is not so puzzling. Jesus was likely fully aware of the fact that John's baptizing was a substitute for offering sacrifices, and approved of it; it's even possible that Jesus gave this idea to John! Thus, Jesus may have agreed to be baptized by John simply to demonstrate his approval of what John was doing.

If Jesus had a negative attitude toward sacrifice, this put him in good company—with some of the Hebrew prophets of old. In fact, it's entirely conceivable that he acquired his negative attitude toward sacrifice from hearing Scripture read—or being told about what some of the prophets had said about sacrifice (see, e.g., [Isaiah 1:11](#) and [Amos 5:21 – 22](#)). And if Jesus had a negative attitude toward sacrifice, he certainly would not have approved of people *later* thinking of his death as sacrificial.

Despite this very real possibility, Christianity developed as a key part of its belief system that Jesus had "died for our sins." And rather than Christians giving primary attention to the teachings of Jesus (as described—and to a degree invented—in the (canonical) gospels), they have insisted that what's important, rather, is *believing* certain "facts" about Jesus. And Christian "intellectuals" have, over the centuries, engaged in mental gymnastics devising theological systems based on the "facts" of Jesus's sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection.

What a waste (as [Thorstein Veblen](#) [1857 – 1929] might have put it)!

Toward a Body-Like Society: Part I

Alton C. Thompson

I am in broad agreement with Barrie Wilson's claim that the "Jesus Movement" came to replaced—under the leadership especially of Paul of Tarsus—by a "Christ Movement." "That is, beliefs about the person of Jesus conceived as a Christ came to obscure what he said and did. Thus, the religion *of* Jesus, the one Jesus practiced and taught, became transformed into a cult *about* the Christ." This "Christ Movement swept Jesus up out of his Jewish context and landed him down right in the midst of a new, strange, Gentile environment. That changed everything, since the Christ figure is not a Jewish Messiah." [1]

In Paul's defense, however, it can be said that:

- There is no evidence that he *deliberately* created a religion that basically betrayed the religion of Jesus. The fact that his actions constituted subversion was simply incidental to the course that he chose to take.
- Had he not done what he did, it's highly likely that Jesus would be a virtual unknown today. It must be remembered that the (canonical) "[gospels](#)"—our primary sources for information (and *disinformation*!) about Jesus—were all written *after* [Paul's letters](#)—and might not have been written *at all* had Paul not written his letters. For one can argue that the gospels were written not only to *supplement* what Paul had written in his letters, but to *correct* Paul.
- Whereas Jesus's "ministry" had been of an *individualistic* nature (perhaps having been forced to be so by the fact of Roman occupation of his society), Paul brought somewhat of a *societal* perspective into his "message," and thereby followed the lead of Hebrew Scripture (e.g., its [gleaning](#) and [tithe](#) laws).

Paul's societal orientation comes through most clearly in his first letter to the [Corinthians](#) (I Corinthians 12:12 – 30):

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of

hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

Although this discussion explicitly compares a human body with a group of “believers,” the analogy can be thought of in broader terms—i.e., a human body compared with a *society*—and that is what I do below. I do so, specifically, by addressing four questions:

- How is a society similar to, as well as different from, a human body?
- If we say that a human society *should be* “body-like,” what, specifically, do we mean?
- *Why* is the society within which we live *not* body-like?
- How can it be made more so?

Here in Part I I address the first three questions, then use Part II to address the fourth one.

Comparing Body and Society

- A human being can live apart from any society; however, if all individuals lived apart from other human individuals, having no contact with others, when all died, the species itself would become extinct. A body part cannot live apart from a body; it can be kept “alive” for a time (for, e.g., use in another person), but in being kept alive is only doing so with help from one or more human individuals (and human-created equipment).
- The parts that constitute a body are part of an *integral whole*; a society, in contrast, consists of *separated* individuals/families.

- Body parts have no *consciousness*, people do.
- Body parts have no *choice* in how they function; people have *some* choice in how they live their lives, but this choice is limited by one's heredity, social position, age, experiences, etc.
- Just as a body needs many different parts for it to function (as Paul noted), a society needs people with many different kinds of skills/interests if *it* is to function.
- The parts of a body work together for the good of the whole; in a society—and especially if the society is a “civilized” one—it is often the case that some live at the expense of others (a fact implicit, e.g., in [Thorstein Veblen's](#) distinction between “[industrial](#)” and [\(merely\) “pecuniary” activities](#). (Were Veblen alive today, he would undoubtedly place “vulture capitalist” Willard [\(Mitt\) Romney](#) in the second category.)
- The parts of a body *cooperate* one with another (but do so unawares); the individuals/families of a society often *compete* with one another—at times consciously, but often unawares.
- The parts of a body are equally important in the sense that all are *necessary* for the body's proper functioning. It's true that a person *can* function if an eye has been lost in an accident, a leg has been amputated, etc., but any loss of a body part presents difficulties for the one with missing parts. In a society, however, except for “primitive” groups, one tends to find variations in status/prestige, power, wealth, etc.: “Civilized” societies tend to be characterized by inequality—seemingly suggesting that some are more necessary than others. The paradox here, however, is that typically those in a society with the “highest” position are the least *necessary*!—for they are basically parasites.
- When a *body* dies, its parts die as well. When *people* die, the society will tend to continue. However, societies can, and do, die from a variety of causes—e.g., internal “rot,” being conquered and destroyed, being destroyed by environmental factors (such as the “global warming” that is currently occurring, and [likely to destroy most societies](#) before the end of this century).
- The parts of a body *lack* the capacity to think and make decisions. The individuals constituting a society *do*, though, have these capacities; but although individuals have the ability to think both about themselves and their families, on the one hand, and about the society they live in, on the other hand, this latter ability tends to be developed by just a few of the society's members—with it rarely being developed in the society's leaders. Which fact can have dire consequences—as was suggested in the previous point (the

reference to the threat to humankind presently being posed by “global warming” (or what some people refer to as “climate change”)

How *Should* a Society be Body-Like?

A society *can* be body-like only in certain ways, but societies can—and do—vary in their characteristics. Thus, real-world societies vary in their degree of “body-likeness,” with “civilized” societies tending to be less body-like than “primitive” ones, but with “civilized” societies themselves varying in degree of “body-likeness.”[2] Some might question using the body as a model for the Good Society, and I will admit that it is not wise to carry the analogy—any analogy—too far. Still, I concur with Paul (but interpreting Paul more broadly than he might like) that it is *useful* to make the analogy. Thus, in this section I briefly note those features of a body that, in my opinion, a society should have.

- When one thinks of the parts of a body, one thinks in *qualitative* terms—i.e., one thinks that the body consists of different *kinds* of parts. In doing so, one in effect puts all of the parts on the same *level*—thereby suggesting that *all* are of importance. If not of *equal* importance, then all being at least *necessary*.

When we humans who live in “civilized” societies think of our society (which, though, few tend to do, except superficially!), we tend to think in *invidious* terms (a fact that I commented on in my [“Explaining an Anomaly”](#)). That is, we tend to compare ourselves with others in our society for whom we have some knowledge, and do so in *quantitative* terms—“I’m more intelligent, talented, wealthy, powerful, etc., than Person X.” This is not a recipe for a healthy society—for in a healthy society individuals would recognize that others differ from oneself primarily in *kind*, not *degree*, terms. One who recognizes “kind” differences in people may also, of course, interpret those “kind” differences in quantitative terms (e.g., “blacks” are inferior to “whites”). In the Good Society, however, one will (to speak in quantitative terms here!) minimize one’s quantitative thinking—especially regarding how one perceives others (so that, e.g., the category “celebrity” would become virtually obsolete).

- Because, in our society, one tends to employ invidious thinking relative to other individuals (even members of one’s own family!), it is not surprising that that mode of thinking has *behavioral* implications—namely, that one perceives oneself in *competition* with others. And because this mode of perception is so common, this becomes a “self-fulfilling prophecy” in that one finds oneself actually in competition with others: Survival in our society *requires* that one compete with others. “Success” is what’s prized in our society, and the forces that tend to impinge on all “inmates” of our society make it difficult for one to simply ignore those forces.

If the Good Society is one wherein qualitative thinking is prized over quantitative thinking, the behavioral implication is that *cooperative* behavior will be the norm, not *competitive* behavior.

Why is Our Society *Not* Body-Like?

- We claim to place a high value on economic efficiency; thus, our thinking about human well-being tends to have an economic focus—so that we “naturally” assume that the consumption of goods and services is what gives one well-being, and that *societal* well-being can be maximized by working for the highest possible level of economic efficiency: If the “machine” is operating well, this must mean that all of the machine’s parts are in order.
- An article of faith with many in our society is that the desired level of economic efficiency can be attained *only* if competition prevails in the society, the economy in particular. This belief has become enshrined in an *ideology* that actually “possesses” many in the society—who become so blinded by the ideology that they are unable to recognize (or unwilling to admit!) that monopoly is more common in our economy than pure/perfect competition.
- Sports play a major role in the society, and all are competitive. Their dominant presence in the society not only promotes the idea that competition is good, but the myth that *fairness* prevails in the society—so that the “best” individual or team always comes out on top. Thus, sports—although ostensibly a “mere” diversion—actually play a *serious* role in our society.
- Other forms of entertainment glorify competition, helping solidify our country’s dominant ideology.
- Religious institutions in the society have done little to combat the dominant ideology, and at times have even aided and abetted it (e.g., the “success gospel”). In part, the lack of a countervailing impact of religious leaders on our society reflects the narrowness of their education—i.e., their ignorance.
- Those in our society who have intellectually rejected its dominant ideology have, nonetheless, been *affected* by it in that it has made them feel impotent and insecure; as a consequence, they have been unable to mount an effective attack on the dominant ideology—a fact that will assume importance in Part II of this essay.

Endnotes

1. Barrie Wilson, [*How Jesus Became Christian*](#). New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008, p. 3. See also, e.g., Hyam Maccoby, [*The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*](#). New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1986.
2. Perhaps [Bhutan](#) is on the road to becoming the country with the most “body-likeness.”

Toward a Body-Like Society: Part II

Alton C. Thompson

In [Part I](#) of this essay I identified four questions, provided answers to the first three, and promised that I would address the fourth in this essay—that question being: How can our society be made more body-like? That question can itself be thought of as involving two questions, namely:

- What *specific* features does a society need to have to be body-like? In Part I I asserted that in the Good Society invidious thinking would be largely absent, and cooperative behavior would be far more common than competitive behavior. What I am asking now is what *features* does a society need to have to realize those two goals.
- How can our society *acquire* those features?

Before addressing those questions, however, it is essential to recognize that we are living in a unique phase of world history in that we humans are faced with the threat of “global warming” (or “climate change,” as some prefer). As Bill Henderson noted in his recent—and excellent—[essay](#) on this web site:

There is a growing science literature on the implications of a 4C rise in global mean temperature; for example Kevin Anderson[1] predicts that a 4C temp rise expected by as soon as 2060 will lead to the premature death of 9 out of 10 people then alive globally.

That is, within the next 50 years not only is the global mean temperature likely to rise by 4° C, but that rise likely will result in an utter decimation of the human population. But not so much as a result of “global warming” *per se* as, rather, phenomena caused directly and indirectly by it—such as starvation, disease, flooding, fires, violence, etc. Given this likelihood—high probability, it would seem—an implication is that *societies themselves* will begin to collapse within the next 50 years.

Now if societies themselves—including most certainly our own—will be disintegrating within a few decades, the above two questions must be considered in a new light. Rather than thinking in terms of trying to make our *existing* society more body-like, it is more rational to think in terms of creating a *new* society within the framework of the existing society. Given this, the question now becomes: *How can a new society be created within the existing one, that new society having features that make it body-like?*

This still leaves us with two questions, however:

- What specific features should be sought for that New Society?—the ultimate goal being to make it body-like.
- How can that New Society be brought into being?

Let us, then, next address these two questions, beginning with the first one.

Specific Features of a Body-Like Society

In my [eBook](#) (Chapters 2 – 4) I discuss the concept of “design specifications,” and therefore in this essay will attempt to supplement rather than repeat that discussion. In addition, my intention here is to be as brief as possible.

I should perhaps begin by noting that humans as *individuals* have survival needs (for food and water), and that our *species* also has a survival need, that its members reproduce. A human’s body accommodates both of those needs in that it has a “drive” to obtain food and water, and also a “drive” to engage in sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite sex (usually). In the Good Society both of these “drives” would still be present (of necessity!), but—regarding food and water—an attempt would be made to provide the society’s members with food and water untainted by additives.

[Some have argued](#) that the sex drive is not satisfied well under existing formal arrangements, and would suggest that new arrangements be developed for the New Society. And although there may be merit in such an argument, those who make such a suggestion should be aware of the possibility that drastic changes could prove disastrous for the society that institutes them. In addition, there is the strong possibility that the sexual problems now evident in our society are not traceable to the sex drive *per se* but, rather, to child rearing deficiencies (see the first point below), to other needs not being met well in this society currently (so that, e.g., feelings of insecurity get manifested in the sexual realm), to an obsession with sex encouraged by movies and television programs, etc. In short, my message here is: Proceed with caution on that front!

Now to a few specific points:

- As a father and grandfather I have some experience with child-rearing, and although I never did any reading on the subject while our three children were small (I have three younger brothers, thus had some child-rearing practice while I was a pre-teen and teen), since then I encountered a book that I recommend highly, [Jean Liedloff’s](#) [1926 – 2011] [The Continuum Concept](#) (1975). Liedloff’s main point—based on her contact with the Yequana natives in South America—is that close bodily contact with the mother (especially) for a lengthy period of time will result in, e.g., an adult who will be anything but anti-social. Will result, that is, in the sort of person that one wants in the New Society.[2]

- Once children are old enough, they should be taught, and encouraged to play, [cooperative games](#). Having been weaned in a “Liedloffian” manner, they will naturally “take” to such games. The prevailing mythology in our society is that individuals are naturally selfish and aggressive/competitive, but an abundance of archeological, primatological, anthropological (i.e., the study of “primitive” groups—such as the Yequana), and experimental research argues otherwise.. I have been a lifelong “fan” of the Green Bay Packers, and if I live long enough will find that it will be impossible to continue being a “fan”—for the simple reason that as our society collapses within a few decades, so will the Packers organization. Thus, even though, as one who has lived in a competitive society all his life, *I* may have difficulty abandoning the Packers, if I live long enough, they will abandon *me*!
- As I am still in the work force (not being able to afford to retire), I rise every work day at 5:00 A.M., either drive to work or take a bus, leave work at 3:30 P.M., and arrive home somewhere between 4:00 P.M. and 5:00 P.M. This is no way to live!—and those involved in creating the New Society would know this. In the first place, the production occurring would take place locally; and, second, production would focus on necessities. Therefore, there would be no “journey to work,” and not much time would be needed to produce that which was needed for survival and comfort.

It does not follow from this, however, that members of the New Society would spend their time simply loafing. What it means, rather, is that people would use their free time to engage in activities that interested them, such as engaging in various crafts. In addition, simply interacting with others would be a priority—and this might take various forms from simply conversing to engaging in cooperative games. However, excessive “busyness” of any kind would be frowned upon.

- Recently, while reading about [Gaviotas](#), Colombia,[3] I learned that its founder—Paolo Lugari—had spent time reading about a Jesuit experiment that had taken place in Paraguay in the seventeenth century. The Jesuits (p. 9) “saw the resident Guaraní Indians as a kind of *tabula rasa*: untainted *Homo sapiens* in their natural state, potentially perfectable [as if they weren’t already!].” Thus, they created “missions, aptly named ‘reductions,’ [which] were consummately paternalistic but nevertheless benevolent, self-sustaining communities that prospered for more than a century, until the Jesuits fell into disfavor with Spain and Portugal and were expelled from colonial Latin America.”

Lugari, in studying this “experiment,” was (p. 10) not, however, “interested in evangelism—Gaviotas didn’t even have a church. What enthralled him about that historic Paraguayan experiment was the music. ‘Everyone,’ he told Yepes,[4] ‘was taught to sing or to play a musical instrument. Music was the loom that wove the community together. Music was in school, at meals, even at work. Musicians

accompanied laborers right into the corn and *yerba mate* fields. They'd take turns, some playing, some harvesting. It was a society that lived in constant harmony—literally. It's what we intend to do, right here in this forest.”

Having myself played the French horn while in high school (band) and college (orchestra),[5] and being a lover of music (classical especially, but having eclectic tastes), I could easily relate to Lugari's statement that music “was the loom that wove the community together.” For as a participant in a band or orchestra, I *felt* that I was a member of a *community*—a part of a *body*. While in band it was the trumpets that were most important, and while in orchestra it was the violins; however, I sensed that *everyone* in the group knew that s/he was an important member of the group—even the person who played the triangle! For the composition being played—whatever it was—required a diversity of instruments—just as the human body requires a series of parts for its proper functioning—and unless each instrument plays its assigned part, the performance will fail to have its intended effect.

The New Society to be created must also emphasize music, and even encourage *composing* in those demonstrating such an ability. For those who learn to harmonize *musically* will find that “harmonizing” in their *relationships with others* will become “second nature.”

- In my “[Dancing and Values](#)” essay I praised the potential virtues—from a values standpoint—of square dancing, and noted that a television program such as “Dancing with the Stars” helps—like competitive sports—reinforce our fixation on competition: Not only are we explicitly *taught* that competition is good, but various elements of our society *implicitly* teach this as well. Is it any wonder, then, why we have such a difficult time accepting the idea that competition is *not* good? Is it surprising that I will continue to watch the Green Bay Packers play (while they are still in existence), even though I “know” that competition is not good?!

Let me now “backtrack” somewhat from what I said in “Dancing and Values.” I continue to believe that square dancing has unique positive consequences for those who participate in it, but now “lower” my standards somewhat in that I give my blessing (for what *that's* worth!) to those other forms of dancing that involve some degree of body contact. Dances that just involve gymnastics displays are a different “animal,” for their purpose is simply to “show off,” and should be avoided in the New Society.

- In any society there are numerous *specific* decisions to be made every day, and the New Society is no exception. In the New Society, however, decisions must be made in a manner that recognizes the importance and dignity of each person—which is why I recommend the Structured Interaction Group, or SIG[6] (earlier referred to as a New

Word Fellowship, or NeWF). Not only can the use of this institution result in good decisions; it can have numerous other positive benefits as well (see pp. 50 – 60 in my [“Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning”](#)).

Realizing the New Society

Bill Henderson, in a recent essay (cited above) notes—citing research by Dr. Kari Marie Norgaard—that although many are aware of the fact that “global warming” poses a serious threat to humankind, few are doing anything about it. Henderson identifies three types of denial—literal, interpretative, and implicatory—and puts the sort of denial discovered by Dr. Norgaard in the “implicatory” category. This fact of “implicatory denial” means that it will be difficult to initiate a New Society movement. And the fact that governments are largely under the control of an economic elite—one that has no interest beyond next quarter’s “bottom line”—means that if a movement is to be initiated, government cannot be expected to provide the necessary leadership. Thus, a few individuals will need to arise to create a movement—and let us hope that this occurs soon!

I will offer but a few words of advice to such people, the first being that I’m convinced that any New Society movement should focus on creating small communities—ones that are body-like sociologically, and designed to be adaptive (so far as “global warming” is concerned). Being “adaptive” can be interpreted in several ways, but one is that these communities should be designed to be as “community-sufficient” as possible (given that the Larger Society is likely to collapse within a few decades). To be “community-sufficient, a community would need to be located in a non-urban environment, which fact would enable its residents to experience, and develop an appreciation for, the natural world.

My second bit of advice is that the SIG/NeWF be retained as a key institution for any given community—for making decisions, for interacting, etc. This institution is simple in its design, but its use will potentially have numerous positive consequences.

Endnotes

1. [Kevin Anderson](#), a noted climate scientist, has been an advisor to the British Government since 2009 on issues related to climate.
2. See also Phyllis K. Davis, *The Power of Touch*. Carson, CA: Hay House, Inc., 1991.
3. Alan Weisman, *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World*. White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 1998.
4. Dr. Gustava Yepes was (p. 6) the “director of the faculty of music at Bogotá’s prestigious Universidad de Los Andes.”

5. In fact, I recently purchased a (cheap) French horn for myself, and am trying to recover some of the skill with which I used to play that beautiful instrument.
6. See my eBook, cited earlier, Chapter 8 (pp. 159 – 164).

[May 6, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/06/pdf-naders-seventeen-traditions/>]

Nader's "Seventeen Traditions:

Alton C. Thompson

Reading the [Introduction](#) ("The Landscape of My Boyhood," is the subtitle) of Ralph Nader's *The Seventeen Traditions* was both a painful and nostalgic experience for me.[1]

It was painful to read how as he and other male classmates were leaving Central School after their eighth-grade classes were over for the day, that one of the boys in his group, in passing a girl in their class, said "What a pig." "She heard him, of course, and as I looked back I saw her shattered expression before she walked away. The boys just laughed loudly. 'Ugh,' one of them added, seconding the remark. I was stunned. This girl was one of our friendliest, and most helpful classmates." "As I walked home, I found myself unable to shake off this sudden episode. What was her crime, I asked myself? She wasn't one of the beauties in our class, but was that her fault? Did she deserve this boy's casual cruelty?"

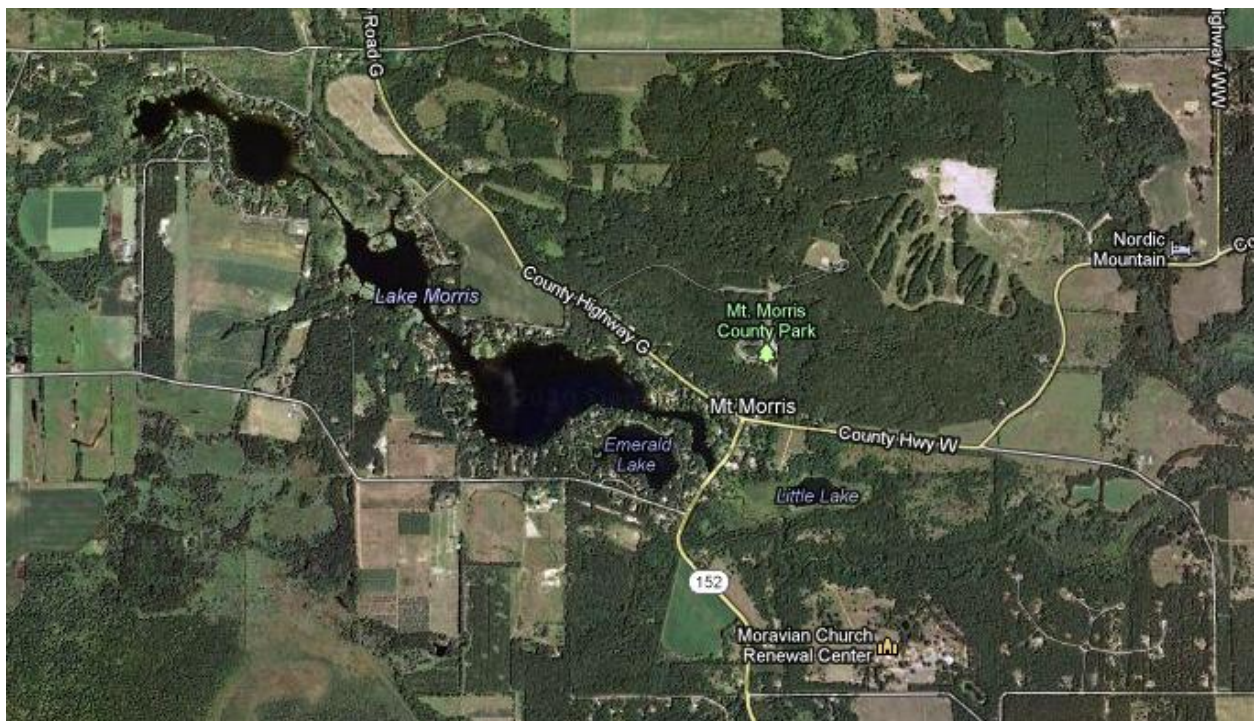
The reason that I found this passage so painful is that I was involved in a similar incident while in grade school—but it was I who was the perpetrator of the cruelty. I was walking home from school with my older sister and a younger brother, and when we encountered two sisters from a family that I knew was poorer than our own, I held my nose—sending the message to them that they smelled because they hadn't taken a bath. This "message" had no basis in fact, and was simply delivered out of meanness. I can still remember the hurt on the face of the older of the two sisters, and I hope that I *never* forget it.

I don't recall if my sister made any comment on my vicious action, if she threatened to tell our parents, or if she did, what they said to me. All I remember is that I had inflicted pain on another human being, and knew immediately that I had done wrong. I knew that my parents had not taught me to be mean, and that they most certainly would not have approved of what I did. But although I knew that I had treated these girls badly, I never apologized to them—to my everlasting shame. I *did*, however, gain something from that experience, for I subconsciously told myself never to repeat such an action—and have tried over the years to make good on that promise to myself.

If reading Nader's Introduction caused me pain, it also—fortunately—was nostalgic for me. Nader was born, and brought up, in "Winsted, a small town nestled in the Litchfield Hills of northwestern Connecticut . . ." "Winsted . . . had spawned a hundred factories and fabrication shops by 1900, and these factories in turn gave rise to homes, shops, and other businesses . . ." It was a walking town, and "Winstedites could walk up nearby hills to visit the dairy farms where their milk came from, . . . [could] relax at Highland Lake (the second largest natural lake in Connecticut), or . . . explore any number of quieter meadows, woods, and streams. It was a

good community for families raising children . . .” “Nature, unsequestered, inspired my mother to sing so often, ‘Oh, what a beautiful morning!’”

I, too, was raised in a small town, but one much smaller than Winsted—one that was simply a service center for surrounding farmers. It consisted of just two stores (one of which also had a bar—of course, for this was Wisconsin!), with its only other feature being a Lutheran retreat camp that mainly was busy in the summer—providing a relief from city living for children living in Milwaukee, Racine, and other urban centers in Wisconsin and elsewhere. Because the area was dominated by lakes (a reason for locating the Lutheran retreat center here), those lakes were surrounded by cottages, some owned by locals, but many of them owned by those who spent time at them during the summer.



The village that I lived in, or near, while growing up was called Mt. Morris, named for the hill (*not* mountain!) just north of the village, in Waushara County, Wisconsin (about 80 miles north of Madison). The place that I most remember living at was located about midway between Little Lake and Emerald Lake, just east of (what later became) Highway 152. Nordic Mountain (upper right) is a ski hill (built long after I left the area), whose drive goes through the farm where my father was raised. (My mother was raised on a farm about a half-mile to the south.)

I have fond memories of growing up in this area—picking cucumbers on our four acres of land (to sell for spending money, and to buy clothing), swimming with my cousin in Lake Morris, playing on the “mountain,” hunting squirrels with my .22 rifle, driving tractor for my mother’s father [2] during the haying season, etc. It was a bucolic existence (although I’m sure that my

memory is distorting reality!), and I am grateful for having had the childhood that I did—and the parents that I did. As I read about Nader’s parents, I am reminded of my own. For although they had both been born in Waushara County, their ancestors had not—my father’s father’s father (Torje Tjøstolvsen) had been born in the Tvedestrand area of Norway, my mother’s father’s father (Nonis Hasselquist) had been born somewhere in Sweden.

Nader refers to his parents having brought various traditions over to Connecticut from Lebanon, and I assume that my ancestors had done the same. But I can’t recall learning any ethnic traditions while growing up, except for the fact that I was taught to be proud of my Scandinavian heritage—viking exploits notwithstanding!—but not to “wear it on my sleeve.” And because, while in high school, I had contact with youth with German, Irish, Scotch, Italian, and even Mexican backgrounds,[3] I learned early on that I lived in a world characterized by diversity.

Nader wrote *The Seventeen Traditions* as somewhat of an autobiography, but especially to provide “guidance and inspiration for the parents, children, and grandchildren of today.” As Nader reflected on his upbringing, it occurred to him that he had acquired a certain set of values, which he termed “traditions,” and used his book to discuss them—devoting a chapter to each of 17 such “traditions”:

- Listening
- The family table
- Health
- History
- Scarcity
- Sibling equality
- Education and argument
- Discipline
- Simple enjoyments
- Reciprocity
- Independent thinking
- Charity
- Work
- Business
- Patriotism
- Solitude
- Civics

Nader states that “what I hope will be especially helpful, in this very different world we inhabit, are my memories of the traditions in which my childhood was immersed—traditions that remain vivid in my mind, and that guide me to this day.”

I find it difficult to find fault with Nader's list of "traditions"—except for one thing: Nader acknowledges that we now inhabit a "very different world" from the one that he and I grew up in, but doesn't seem to realize *how* different this world will be *becoming* shortly. So that given this (highly likely) "fact," the question that arises—for parents especially—is: How can I best prepare my children for the future? Is the inculcation of Nader's 17 principles sufficient, or should they be *supplemented* with additional principles?

Nader's "traditions"—as principles to teach one's children—seem to be based, tacitly at least, on the assumption that although our society will continue to change, and do so in unpredictable ways, our children will be able to adapt to those changes—whatever they are. Put another way, the tacit assumption here seems to be that although *details* will be changing, the basic *structure* of the society will remain basically unchanged—so that our children will be able to adapt to the changes that occur without undue difficulty.

Up to this point in our history, this (tacit) assumption has not presented insuperable difficulties—for the basic structure of the society *has* remained intact. Today, however, our children face the prospect that the society within which they live will be *collapsing* while they are still alive, which disintegration will present them with a *unique* challenge, one not faced by their grandparents, or (perhaps) even parents. If one *anticipates* that challenge, and one makes *plans* for how one will meet this challenge, one may be able to survive—although there are no guarantees regarding that. However, if one *ignores* the "handwriting on the wall," so that societal collapse catches one off guard, one is likely to die prematurely from one cause or another.

Societal collapse could occur for a variety of reasons—e.g., [growing inequality](#) may become so severe as to set off massive violence, eventuating in the collapse of our society. The basic cause that I have in mind here, however, is that of "global warming." (For excellent recent presentations on this see [this](#) and [this](#) by Bill Henderson.) As Henderson notes in the first of these essays, British scientist Kevin Anderson—an advisor to the British government on climate matters—predicts that the world's population will be reduced, within the next 50 years, to 10% of its current 7 billion by "global warming"—i.e., the phenomena *directly* associated with it (such as extreme heat and severe storms), and the phenomena *indirectly* so associated (such as fires, floods, starvation, disease, and violence). As that culling of the human population occurs, inevitably will societies—including ours, most certainly—collapse at some point (perhaps as early as within three decades!).

Now if there is an unprecedented "die off" of the human population within the next few decades (as I believe there will be), this caused by "global warming," the suggestion is that one recognize this threat *today*, and begin planning how one, and one's children, will cope with this threat. I

would advise anybody that it would be foolish of them to assume that government will engage in activities that will “save” them (given elite control of that institution) and that, instead, they start thinking about joining with others to create a small eco-community at a “safe” location, one that is specifically designed with the threat posed by “global warming” in mind. I have tried to alert my two married children—a son and a daughter—to this danger for them and their children (four in all), but so far have not been successful. May others have more success!

Endnotes

1. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

2. My father’s parents had both died long before I was born. My dad’s father had contracted tuberculosis and was advised by the doctor to move to the Southwest. As his wife, prior to marriage, had been a nanny for the Otto Schnering family in Chicago, and had accompanied them on many long-distance trips, they moved to one of the locations with which she was familiar, San Bernardino, California. That’s where my dad went to high school, but he moved back to Wisconsin after high school, leaving his brother and two sisters, and parents, behind—the parents, and a sister, dying shortly thereafter. (Otto Schnering was founder of the [Curtiss Candy Company](#) in Chicago, and dad’s brother—Otto Raymond Thompson—(“Uncle Ray”) was named for him, but didn’t like the name “Otto.”)

3. My best friend in high school had a Scotch extraction. The reason that some of my classmates had an Italian heritage, is that in nearby Redgranite and Lohrville there had been granite quarries, and Italians were brought in to work in them. During the summers some of the farmers in the area grew cucumbers (the sandy soil that was common in the area was conducive to this), and hired migrant workers (especially from Texas, with a Mexican heritage) to work in the fields. A few of these made the area their permanent home, and a younger brother of mine had one of these as a good friend. I spent a few summers working at a cucumber-receiving station that a friend’s father owned, and thereby came in contact with many “Mexicans.”

“What Am I To Believe?”

Alton C. Thompson

Of *claimed* facts, there are:

- Those which have rather firm empirical support, and can therefore be accepted as “true.”
- Those that *lack* such support, and therefore should be rejected.

We continually encounter—in our reading, in our conversations with others, in our television watching, etc.—*both* types of “facts,” and therefore are confronted with two problems:

- Determining which *category* a given claimed fact falls into.
- Deciding, of those “facts” which one can accept as “true,” which are *important*, which are not.

The number of claimed facts—of both categories—“out there” is so huge that anyone who is seriously interested in believing only the “true” is presented, first, with the problem of distinguishing the one type of “fact” from the other. In carrying out that “operation” it is highly likely that that individual will make placement errors—accepting that which should not be accepted, rejecting that which should not be rejected. Given that what one accepts as “true” will guide the direction of one’s thinking, reading, etc., this fact of making placement errors has, then, implications beyond that of simply making placement errors. And an additional problem here is that once one settles on a certain set of beliefs, it may become very difficult for one to change those beliefs in the face of an encounter with new “facts.” Some individuals, of course, are more open to change than others; but because a change in one’s belief system may involve a “loss of face,” that fact acts—subconsciously, at least—as a deterrent to belief system change. (Note that to refer to a “belief system,” is to assert that one’s beliefs are not haphazard but, rather, are *connected* one to another. The degree of “connectedness” can, of course, vary from person to person.)

No one, of course, makes an effort to learn *all* of the “facts”—whether true or not—that are “out there.” In fact, no one even has that *ability*. One must, of necessity, make *choices* (conscious or otherwise) as to the *kinds* of “facts” that one will focus on at the expense of all other “facts.” Some, in doing so, choose a rather wide variety of “facts,” some a rather narrow range—with many others choosing a range somewhere between the two extremes.

Choosing a rather *narrow* range has the advantage that this facilitates separating the “true” facts—the ones that should be accepted, and become a part of one’s belief system—from those that should *not* be accepted. The problem with such a choice, however, is that knowledge developments in areas outside one’s interest area may have relevance for one’s belief system, so that one’s belief system is then deprived of important factual knowledge—knowledge that might cause a shift in one’s intellectual orientation, and in a direction that one would approve.

If one’s interests are *broad*, an advantage is that one may be able to integrate knowledge from a variety of knowledge areas—i.e., engage in creative thinking. Such thinking may itself constitute new knowledge, or may “merely” result in the formulation of new hypotheses to be tested. In either case, however, one’s efforts may result in the *expansion* of knowledge. The danger in having a broad range of interests, though, is that one will have a lessened ability to separate the “wheat from the chaff” in any given knowledge area, and may therefore inadvertently accept as “factual” what one should not—thereby reducing the value of whatever “advances” in knowledge one may make.

In making choices as to the *kinds* of “facts” to focus on it is probably most common to do so on the basis of one’s *interests*—which word can be given at least two different meanings. On the one hand, one may focus on that which *fascinates* one—for reasons of which one may be only dimly—if at all—conscious. This, in fact, is usually what we mean in referring to a person’s interests. However, given that we live—and have, for centuries now lived—in a time when economic/materialistic concerns are given priority over other concerns, and the prevailing ideology insists that happiness comes from consuming ever more goods and services, “interests” also now is often interpreted to refer to one’s *economic* “interests” (or, related to this, one’s interests so far as power, influence, celebrity, etc.) are concerned. That is, “Will such and such contribute to my income/wealth, or will it not?”

Although it is highly probable that most individuals, in making a choice as to the *kinds* of “facts” to learn do so on the basis of their “interests”—defined in either of the above two ways—there is at least one other basis for making this choice—*relevance*. That is, as one surveys the broad field of knowledge—while, e.g., a liberal arts student at a college or university—one may decide that certain types of knowledge are more *relevant*—i.e., more *important*—than others, and therefore decide that one must concentrate one’s efforts in expanding one’s knowledge in those areas—perhaps, in the process, finding oneself even *contributing* to knowledge in those areas. Thus, even though one’s primary interest may be in, e.g., geology or music, etc., one reaches the conclusion that *other* areas of knowledge have more importance, so that one has an obligation to pursue one or more of those other areas. In doing so, one may retain—as a dilettante—one’s *original* interests, while then *developing* an interest in that which one regards as more relevant, important, and working to expand one’s knowledge in that area.

What makes knowledge “relevant”? The reason(s) that something is “relevant” to one person may differ from the reason(s) that is “relevant” to another individual. It seems to me, however, that the basic reason for considering a certain body of knowledge as “relevant” is that one decides (perhaps unconsciously) that that knowledge *can* be acted upon, and *should be*. Why? The reasons that might be cited here are likely to vary from person to person; I would like to think, however, that *human well-being* is the principal basis for making this judgment. Thus, one person might decide that s/he needs to become a cancer researcher so that s/he can save lives; another may decide that s/he lacks an ability to do research, but is good at interacting with others, and therefore needs to become a psychiatrist. Etc.

My own perspective on the matter has been shaped by a variety of factors, and likely I am aware of just a few of them. But if I were to list them, I would include such factors as having been brought up in the United States in a rural/small town environment, in a family that was church-going (but whose parents were independent-thinking enough to leave the Christian denomination in which they had been raised for first one, then another, Christian denomination); having had formal schooling especially in History, Geography, Geology, Economics, and Sociology; and having developed, some time ago, an interest in [“utopian” thought](#), and having read fairly extensively in that literature, and the related literature dealing with [“intentional” communities](#).

Perhaps especially because of the latter fact (i.e., my exposure to “utopian” thought in particular), several decades ago it occurred to me that the fact that “ideal” societies had been presented in fictional form for centuries indicated that (a) there must be good reason to be critical of the then-Existing Order, and (b) a different—“better”—society was not only *conceivable*, but *possible*.

In having reached these conclusions, I thought I would turn my attention to the “how” of societal system change (given that early on I had come to think of societies as *systems*), and in 1984 developed, and published, a 5-“wave” scenario/strategy of societal system change.[1] I gave some thought to implementing this “plan,” but in concluding that I had neither the resources nor ability to do so, I abandoned that “plan.”

However, the idea of societal system change itself did not leave me, and although I was not of aware of it at the time, I began shifting my attention to the topic of human well-being, and what people *need* for a high level of well-being. That is, I began to ask myself (unconsciously), “*If* the Good Society were to exist, what features would it need to have for all of its citizens to have a high level of well-being?” I therefore read fairly widely, purchased books that I found to be relevant, and took notes on other books that I deemed relevant, but had not purchased.

At some point—and for reasons that I do not fully know[2]—I became interested in [Charles Darwin's](#) [1809 – 1882] *The Origin of Species*, and began reading books about Darwin and writing down my ideas related to Darwin. This culminated in an [eBook](#) (only partially completed), in which I presented my “findings” regarding Darwin.

That interest in Darwin led me to encounter a book on [Sociobiology](#) by David P. Barash (the original 1977 edition), and therein I learned of the “discrepancy” concept. That concept struck me as of exceeding importance in explaining human ill-being, and in an [eBook](#) written last year I discussed that concept (Chapter 2), along with that of “design specifications”[3] (Chapters 3 and 4). In that eBook I had also (Chapter 8) introduced the Structured Interaction Group (SIG) as an institution to be used for *planning* the Good Society—one designed with human well-being as its primary goal.[4]

I'm not sure when I first learned about, and became interested in, the subject of “global warming,” but in recent years have especially read a few of [James Lovelock's](#) books, some works by James Hansen, and a few others. What my reading on this subject has led me to conclude is that:

- The various phenomena associated—directly and indirectly—with “global warming” have now passed the point of no return—meaning that it is now too late to halt the various consequences associated with “global warming.”
- As “global warming” proceeds, more and more people will die prematurely—for a variety of reasons connected with “global warming.” For example, [Kevin Anderson](#)—an advisor to the British government on climate matters—predicts that within the next 50 years the earth's population will be reduced to about 10% of what it is now—a drastic reduction, to be sure!
- *That* (very strong) possibility means that societies will be collapsing (including ours, of course) within the new few decades, and that *therefore* it is no longer sensible to think in terms of “societal system change.” Rather, it is *now* only sensible to think of creating a New Society within the existing one—or to be more specific, to create a *series* of new societies within the existing ones.

This latter conclusion follows logically (I would contend) from the first two conclusions, and is thus dependent on the “factuality” of the first two. Not being a climate scientist myself I must accept the views of others in the discipline—and I hope that I have made good choices in doing so.

However, even if climate scientists—the ones upon whom I have relied—have been wrong in their conclusions, this does not constitute a reason for me to withdraw the third conclusion—the

conclusion that *I* have drawn from their work. Why not? Our society (among others) has so many problems at present, problems that appear intractable, that it appears to me that the only way to solve those problems is to work at creating a new society!

If our society does *not* show evidence of collapsing within a few decades, it will be difficult to initiate a Movement to create a New Society. However, if it *does* show such evidence, this will be a “plus” for such a Movement—and for two reasons. First, because more will be attracted to the Movement—meaning that more may survive than might be the case otherwise. Second, because as the Larger Society weakens, its leaders will be less able to halt the Movement’s progress—except for the fact that desperate people trying to escape the collapsing Larger Society, may pose a threat to the Movement. (Which possibility suggests—for the benefit of those deciding to join the Movement—that they concentrate their survival efforts at “safe” locations.)

Endnotes

1. “Ecotopia: A ‘Gerendipitous’ Scenario,” *Transition: The Quarterly Journal of S.E.R.G.E.* (The Socially & Ecologically Responsible Geographers), Vol. 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984), pp. 2 – 8.
2. I suspect, however, that my reading about Social Darwinism while in a college History course is what “provoked” this interest. Also, however, my exposure to “[location theory](#)” while a student at the University of North Carolina had put me in a frame of mind that made it “natural” for me to examine Darwin’s theory in the light of the mode of thinking that exposure to location theory had implanted in my mind.
3. I had learned this concept from George Edgin Pugh’s *The Biological Origin of Human Values*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977
4. Five years ago, and under the name James B. Gray, I had written a [paper](#) in which I termed this institution a New Word Fellowship (NeWF). The discussion in that paper gives more detailed ideas of possible consequences of SIG/NeWF participation.

[May 10, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/10/lets-get-real/>]

Let's Get Real!

Alton C. Thompson

Rob Urie (“an artist and political economist in New York”), in his recent “[The Power of Plutocracy](#),” stated:

A social division exists where the rich and the politically connected have impunity for their crimes[,] while the police and the surveillance state are used as tools of social control and political repression against the rest of us. Were redress available through the established order, criminal prosecutions of culpable elites would already have taken place.

He then went on to state that “a set [numbering 5] of concrete economic proposals that would immediately improve the lives of those most affected by the current economic crisis, as well as those of the long-term dispossessed, exists without being enacted[,] and with no impetus for enacting them from either major political party.”

Urie then listed those “proposals,” and discussed each. The list:

- (1) A government works program that would guarantee a job to every person who can work and who wants a job
- (2) Medicare for all that would guarantee access to healthcare for all citizens regardless of their ability to pay
- (3) Expanded programs of food security that would guarantee healthy, adequate and nutritious food for everyone in America
- (4) Free access to public education for every American from pre-school through graduate school including trade school education that would feed the trades and the government works program
- (5) Increased funding for the arts that would revive American culture and shift the cultural focus from joyless striving to facilitating a creative, peaceful and nurturing world.

“These proposals[,he added,] are designed to provide a starting point for political dialogue. They are *not* the collective views of Occupy Wall Street or any group mentioned in this piece.”

I must admit that I have no problem with any of the above five goals. But Urie, in recognizing the extreme inequality in this society—not only in income/wealth, but in power/influence—seems somehow to forget the *relevance* of that disparity; for if but a few in our society possess most of its resources, and have a degree of influence/power that is unprecedented, how on earth will it be *possible* to realize those goals? The short answer: It *won't* be possible! Given this, what is the point of the “political dialogue” that he advocated (between whom, by the way?—members of the non-elite, between non-elite people and elite ones?).

What makes this listing, and the subsequent discussion of the items listed, so *pointless*, however, is his prior statement that “Were redress available through the established order” The “obvious” question that arises here relative to this phrase is: Given that he used the conditional “*were*” here, he thereby admitted that redress was *not*—I repeat, **not**—available—“through the established order,” that is.

Thus, on the one hand Urie demonstrated *confidence* in the “established order” by identifying, and then discussing, a set of proposals. On the other hand, however, by stating “were redress available through the established order,” he declared—if but tacitly—his belief that redress was *not* possible—an “admission” that then rendered his entire presentation pointless.

Urie is not alone in making recommendations that many would perceive as highly desirable—*were* they to be implemented. Usually, however, those who make such recommendations do not “slip” like Urie did and say—actually, or in effect—that “Oh, by the way, I fully realize that the proposals that I am about to make have no chance whatsoever of being realized, but I am going to offer them to you anyway!” If one perceives problems in the society, and is able to *imagine* how things *should* be, rather, one may feel compelled to publicize those ideas. But if one is incapable of “thinking outside the box,” one’s suggestions will be based on the (tacit) assumption that those suggestions *can* be implemented within the context of the Existing Order—the result being that one’s recommendations will be no more substantial than thin air.

This point should be obvious, but in case it is not, let me offer a few comments to support it.

Either our problems *can* be solved within the context of the “established order,” or they *cannot* be—and it seems clear to me that they *cannot be*. Why not? Our society has never been egalitarian, but seemingly has become more and more *inegalitarian* with each passing decade. It’s true that the blot of slavery was removed from our society during the nineteenth century—as a consequence of a bloody Civil War—but the “lot” of blacks (as a group) in our society is still not comparable to that of whites. And other minorities—ethnic (e.g., Hispanics), gays, etc.—are still not fully integrated into the society.

The principal way that our society has become more inegalitarian is in the incomes that people “earn.” But as that disparity has grown, so have other types of disparity—most notably in power/influence. The wealthier one is, the more power/influence is *available* to one. Power and

influence need not, however, *automatically* accompany increased wealth—so that not all those who acquire great wealth use that wealth to gain power and influence. But many do, using that wealth not only to gain increasing control over the economy *per se*, but over government—thereby gaining *further* control over the economy. The recent (2010) [*Citizens United*](#) decision by “our” Supreme Court has enabled wealthy corporations to increase their presence in politics; and, indeed, it’s likely that more money will be spent on elections in the current election cycle than in any previous one in our history!

Now if people were to become wealthy with the motive of using the bulk of the money “earned” for philanthropic purposes, there would be little basis for worrying about increasing inequality: The wealthy, rather than *being* a problem for the society, would be the *answer* to most of its problems. Needless to say, however, such is not the case: One suspects that even those who are noted for their philanthropy engage in it for *selfish* reasons rather than out of a sense of duty, obligation; and suspects that most of those who seek wealth do so for selfish reasons. The irony here, though, is that they—not having read Thorstein Veblen’s [*The Theory of the Leisure Class*](#) (1899)—tend not even to be aware of the societal dynamics (rather than “human nature”) that are the *basis* of their competitive behavior and selfishness.

What those—such as Rob Urie—who have suggestions for improving society need to recognize is that the elite not only has the power—and motivation—to *squelch efforts* at societal improvement, but the power and motivation to *destroy the lives* of those who oppose it—whether by “character assassination” or other means (including outright killing). If it is clear that the proposals that one makes cannot, and will not, be implemented, the intellectuals (better termed *prostitutes*!) who work for the elite may not take notice. Which will make the person offering the proposals both safe—and irrelevant.

If, however, one believes—as I do—that the only real solution to our problems is *societal system change*, and one publicizes this idea, one may not be so safe. If one, such as the brilliant Philip Slater, writing in [*The Pursuit of Loneliness*](#), presents a devastating critique of our society, offers recommendations for societal change, but it is not clear how those recommendations might be implemented, and if the elite’s lackey’s become aware of those recommendations, the author may be safe—because his/her ideas pose no real threat. But if someone were to offer ideas for change that were more clearly implementable, that someone might be in danger—if, that is, the ideas become known to the elite’s lackeys. Therefore, if one has some ideas for societal system change that would seem capable of implementation, that person is advised: Proceed with care!

I sense that many others in our society besides myself are in at least vague agreement with me that the problems our society has currently are so severe that the only answer is societal system change—they are in vague agreement with this position, but unable to *articulate* it, however. Were the possibility of societal system change made clearly known to them, many of them would *embrace* it, I believe. This raises the question, however:

How should those people be informed of this possibility, given that if one is too “open” in doing so, one will likely alert those who prostitute their intellects in the service of the elite, who will then use their pens to attack the idea savagely, and get their bosses to squelch any such efforts?

It would appear that we are in somewhat of a “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” sort of situation. If one *does* publicize one’s ideas regarding societal system change, one runs the risk of alerting those *interested* in such change along with those *against* it; and given that those in the latter category have the power in the society, they may act to squelch efforts at societal system change—and, as a consequence, such change will not, then, occur. *Planned* such change, I should add, given that societal change will occur whether it is planned for or not—e.g., as a result of “global warming” within a few decades. On the other hand, if one does *not* publicize one’s ideas, the societal change likely to occur will probably be all of a negative nature.

If one has been writing about societal system change, and has not run into problems with the elite, this may be for one of two reasons:

- The elite’s lackeys have not become aware of what one has written—e.g., because one has not been writing for periodicals or web sites that have a large readership.
- These lackeys *have* become aware of what one has written, but have reached the conclusion that the proposals offered will never be implemented—so that they pose no threat to the elite.

How, then, should one proceed if one has what one believes are implementable ideas regarding societal system change, realizes the dangers involved in publicizing them, but is determined to see one’s proposals acted upon? It would seem that there are two possible courses:

- Attempt to make more people aware of one’s ideas, recognizing the risks that entails.
- Identify individuals who have wealth, or access to wealth, who might be interested in one’s ideas, and willing to support their implementation, and contact such individuals.

The second option would seem the wiser course—for there *must* be a few people “out there” who have not only wealth, but enough awareness of “climate science” to realize that we are living in precarious times, and that as “global warming” advances, they will not be able to escape its effects. Some such people may even have the intelligence to realize that although members of the elite may have an advantage in the early phases of the societal collapse that is likely to result from “global warming,” in the long run, however, they will have the *least* chance to survive.

It may very well be the case, in fact, that *only* the rich can save us, as [Ralph Nader](#) has argued. However, this will only occur if they (*some* of them, at least) come to realize that (a) few *can* be saved, but that (b) if they come to understand that whatever “salvation” is possible lies in

creating a New Society within the Existing Order, and then (c) use—ASAP—their resources and power to work to create that New Society, it's conceivable that many more humans will survive "global warming" than what some climate scientists predict (e.g., perhaps only 7% of what it is now, or even much lower).

At present, government is under the control of the elite, and is used to serve the interests of the elite. If, however, at least some members of the elite would "wake up," they could use their resources, power, and influence not only *directly* to bring about change, but *indirectly* through their influence on government.

I fear, however, that I am only dreaming!

Confronting the Future

Alton C. Thompson

When I peer into the future now, as opposed to, e.g., 60 years ago, I see something rather different. Actually, that's a lie, for I can't rightly say that I have a clear memory of how I conceived the future in 1950. I assume, however, that I had a much more optimistic view of the future then than I do now. At present, my view of the future is dominated by the thought that the various phenomena associated—directly and indirectly—with “global warming” will severely cull the world's population before the end of this century. For example, British scientist Kevin [Anderson](#) has raised the prospect of a reduction of the world's population **by 90%** within the next 50 years. (Sometimes I feel like a modern [Cato the Elder](#)—famous for repeatedly saying “Carthage must be destroyed!”—in my “harping” on global warming; I do this, however, because I sincerely believe that there is no more important problem facing humans at present.)

Over the years negative feedback mechanisms have been operating to maintain relative stability in the world's climate; so that when a disturbance occurs—such as a volcanic eruption—those mechanisms “go to work” to address that disturbance, and bring earth's climate back to a “normal” condition. Any system can, however, be stressed beyond the point where it is able to effectuate recovery, in which case the negative feedback mechanisms will give way to positive feedback ones—which act to *hasten* the change; which act, in other words, in a manner *opposite* to negative feedback mechanisms.

Have we now passed the point of no return with climate change? There is evidence that we have; but even if we have not, it seems certain that we will *soon*—given the inertia built into our *societal* systems, along with the fact that efforts to halt global warming are either feeble or non-existent. The reason for the latter is that many in our society are in denial regarding “global warming,” in large part because producers of conventional energy (especially coal and petroleum) seem to be so obsessed with making as much money as they can that they are literally *unable* to take “global warming” seriously, and help others remain ignorant about the issue through spending billions of dollars on denial propaganda.

As one with children (3) and grandchildren (4) who has done some reading of the climate change literature (of which I claim no expertise, however), and who connects recent extreme weather events with global warming, I have come to conclude that:

- Global warming is real, not an illusion.
- Global warming has proceeded to a point where it cannot be now halted: Even if humans worldwide would, as of today, cease emitting “greenhouse” gases into the atmosphere,

global warming would continue—because, I believe, positive feedback mechanisms are now operating.

- Given that conclusion, our only choice now, as humans, is to engage in adaptive activities designed to “save” us.
- Even if we do engage in such activities, this will not guarantee our survival; it *may* result in the survival of some, but *will not* result in the survival of all.
- It is foolish beyond measure to look to government—whether national, state, or local—for assistance in adapting—given government’s control (especially at the national level) by people in the private sector who are blind to the future.

Now given the above points, an individual intent on engaging in adaptive activities needs to ask several questions:

- Should I engage in adaptive activities as an individual (or family, if one is married), or should I do so as part of a small group?
- Given the atmospheric phenomena associated with global warming, how can I/we acquire the food (defined broadly, to include water) that I/we will need for survival?
- Will my/our adaptive activities require movement (i.e., migration) for the present place of residence, or is *in situ* adaptation feasible?
- If migration is required, are there considerations in addition to that of food acquisition that should be given attention?

This is not to say that there aren’t other questions also of importance, but the above four strike me as of especial importance, and I will briefly comment on each of them here.

Individual/Family or Group?

If one has the skills to be self-sufficient—rare in our society, which virtually requires one to be a specialist—one might choose to relocate to a location that would enable one to be self-sufficient—perhaps especially if one is a “loner” who does not need the company of others, and perhaps even prefers to be one’s own company. Most of us, though, have families, and at the very least would aim for “family sufficiency.” However, even *that* would be chosen by few, for two reasons. First, very few families—even very large ones—include the range of skills that would enable the family to be dependent only on other family members. Thus, because a *group* of families would usually contain a greater range of skills than would a single family, most

families would realize that achieving “self-sufficiency” would be much easier with a group of families than with a single family.

Second, most people are “social” to an important degree; they not only *like* to associate with others, but have a *need*—psychologically—so to do. Given that the factors that were involved in our evolution—most notably predation and sexual selection—favored the survival of those who lived in groups, group living became “natural” for humans. It is not surprising, then, that most who would choose to engage in adaptive activities would choose the group option over the individual or family option.

Acquiring Food

Our distant ancestors acquired food solely by gathering and scavenging, and at a later point hunting was added to the *repertoire*. Then, beginning about 10,000 years ago crop raising began, which led to the domestication of some plants, and the beginning of animal tending (which tended to replace hunting, then, as a source of meat). Even after hunting (and then animal tending) entered the picture, however, it was plant-based food products that continued to be the chief sources of food.

The modern who wishes to adapt (or try to!) to the fact of global warming will be faced not only with the problem of increasing temperatures (from a trend standpoint) but (a) increasing *variability* in temperature/precipitation/wind conditions and (b) an increase in *general* storminess and an increase in the number of *severe* storms.

What the above consequences of global warming suggest is that those striving to adapt, from a food acquisition standpoint, to the atmospheric changes that will be occurring:

- Learn to be gatherers once again. (See, e.g., Peter Goodchild’s [*Survival Skills of the North American Indians*](#) (1999), and Samuel Thayer’s [*The Forager’s Harvest: A Guide to Identifying, Harvesting, and Preparing Edible Wild Plants*](#) (2006).
- Learn to be hunters once again.
- Recognize that crop growing might best occur in [greenhouses](#), where temperature and moisture conditions can be controlled to a significant extent.
- Raise animals (for meat and other purposes) that can subsist on grass (rather than requiring grain), given that grass is more readily available.
- Recognize that developing a [fish pond](#) might be a good idea.

In Situ Adjustment or Migration?

Will Allen here in Milwaukee has established an organization called “[Growing Power](#)” to demonstrate what can be done within an urban context to provide food for urban residents. Growing Power is on a 3-acre site, and when one thinks of the vacant land available in cities—and the park land that *could* be converted in an emergency—one realizes that if Milwaukee and other cities were to follow the lead of Growing Power, most cities could become important food producers. When Milwaukee was under “Socialist” leadership—[Victor Berger](#), Daniel Hoan, and Frank Zeidler were all mayors of Milwaukee—with Zeidler’s term ending in 1948, it was known as one of the most progressive cities in the United States. The Growing Power “experiment” now occurring here may make it a leader once again!—but in a different way.

As I indicated in a [previous essay](#), however, I am a “country boy” at heart; and even though I have lived in the Milwaukee area since 1976 (and lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1967 to 1970), I regard the village of Mt. Morris, Wisconsin, as my home. An implication of that fact is that I prefer establishing small eco-communities as an adaptation option over the Growing Power variety. This is not to say that I disapprove of the Growing Power option—for I most certainly do not; my “heart,” however is in a more rural type of solution. In addition, under the next heading I will make a point that argues in favor of a rural type of solution.

For now, however, let me say that I favor the eco-community sort of solution—such communities established in rural areas—because the community itself would be an interaction group sociologically, and I see that as an advantage. For one thing, such a setting would be ideal for establishing Structured Interaction Groups (SIGs), an institution that I introduced in my [eBook](#) (having previously discussed it under the name New Word Fellowship (NeWF) in an [earlier paper](#)). As I argue especially in the latter paper, participation in such an institution can have manifold benefits, I believe, for those who participate. An eco-community, as I conceive it, would be a self-governing unit, and as it grew in size (being prevented from growing “too large,” however), it would acquire more and more of an ability to be “community-sufficient” in many, if not all, respects. (However, as proliferation of such communities occurred, there would arise the possibility of more and more specialization of communities, and interchange between communities. As this occurs, what must be prevented from occurring is the development of a hierarchical society—with its inequality, exploitation, and the various evils associated with them.)

Other Considerations

The “other consideration” that comes to my mind is that of *safety*. If Prof. Anderson (see above) is correct in his projection of an extremely severe culling of the world’s population occurring

between now and 2060 (and I see no reason to question this), an implication is that societies will be collapsing—and that people will become desperate. We are used to a fairly smoothly-operating system of supply of necessities, and find it difficult to conceive of this system breaking down—and utterly collapsing. But it will—if population is severely culled. It's true that if the United States had 30 million people rather than its current 300 million, it could be as “civilized” as the current population is (which is not to make undue claims regarding our current level of civilization, however!).

The point, however, is that the transition from 300 million to 30 million *cannot* be a smooth one. It *must* involve substantial disruption, and because of the food shortages that will undoubtedly arise, a tremendous amount of violence will accompany that disruption. Operations such as Growing Power in Milwaukee will be threatened, as will be similar operations. Only those adaptation efforts that occur away from major population concentrations will be relatively safe. Even then, residents of a rural eco-community may be faced with situations where they must choose between feeding those who appear at their door or shooting them. Because of the latter possibility, those who choose the eco-community option *must* make a concerted effort to work for the proliferation of such communities.

At age 72, I will not live to experience the disruption that will be occurring in our society (and all other ones, of course). My children and grandchildren will, however, and I fear for their future. May at least *some* in our society wake up to the threat that faces us at present, and begin to act. Likely it will be impossible to save many lives, but an effort must be made to save as many as possible.

[May 14, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/14/pdf-trendular-atmospheric-depatternization/>]

Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization

Alton C. Thompson

The related (but not identical) terms “global warming” and “climate change” are both misleading—perhaps even dangerously so—and therefore should be replaced. I recommend “trendular atmospheric depatternization” as a suitable replacement. However, as that term is a tad cumbersome, I suggest TAD as a shortened version. Thus, I recommend that if one is tempted to use either “global warming” or “climate change,” one use TAD instead.

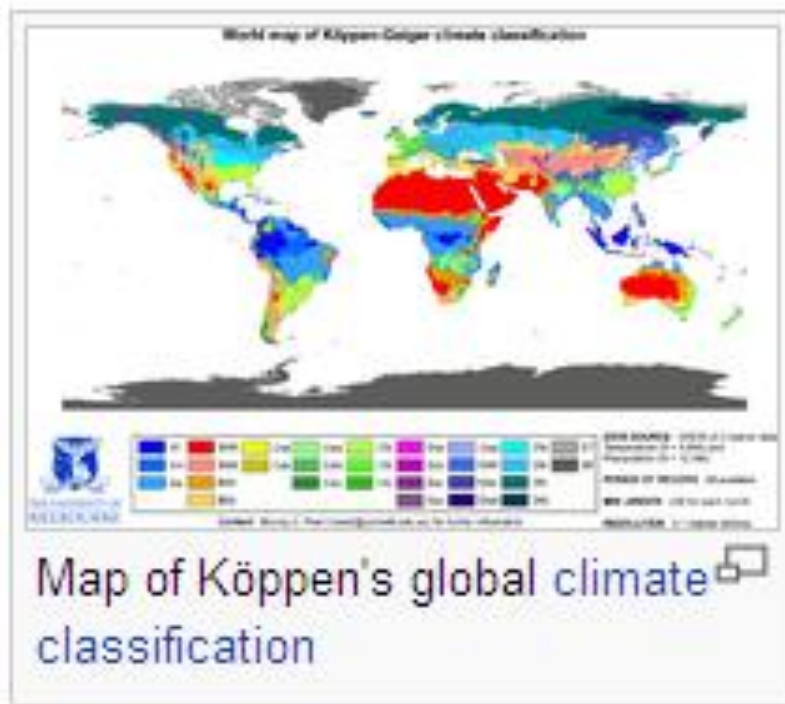
To explain why TAD can replace *both* “global warming” and “climate change,” despite the fact that their meanings are not identical (although similar), I need to first define “climate.” One [definition](#) of “climate” is: “**Climate** encompasses the statistics of [temperature](#), [humidity](#), [atmospheric pressure](#), [wind](#), [precipitation](#), atmospheric particle count and other [meteorological](#) elemental measurements in a given region over long periods.” A much briefer definition, however, is: “The usual weather of a place for any given year.”

The idea behind the concept of “climate” is that for any given location (with some exceptions) there is a certain *pattern* of temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind, etc., conditions during the course of a year, and because that pattern is repeated year after year at that location, the location can be said to have a certain *climate*. It is the repetition of a *pattern* in atmospheric conditions at a given location that enables one to declare that it has a certain *climate*.

Despite the fact that in a very real sense each location has its own *unique* climate—so that there are as many climates as there are locations—it has been found useful to recognize that the “profiles” of some locations are more similar than they are to other profiles, so that it is sensible to *group* profiles—i.e., to identify *types* of climates.

Although the ancient Greeks invented the concept of climate (*klima*), the German/Russian geographer [Wladimir Köppen](#) [1848 – 1940] was the first person to develop an elaborate classification of climate types. Köppen’s observations while traveling in Russia, along with his meteorological studies in the late 1800s, led to his initial development of a classification system, around 1900. He worked on improving this system the rest of his life, publishing his final version in 1936.

Since Köppen’s time various other individuals have developed their own classification systems, including most notably Charles W. [Thorntwaite](#) [1899 – 1963]; and the [Spatial Synoptic Classification System](#), based on the air mass classification scheme developed by [Tor H. P. Bergeron](#) [1891 – 1977].

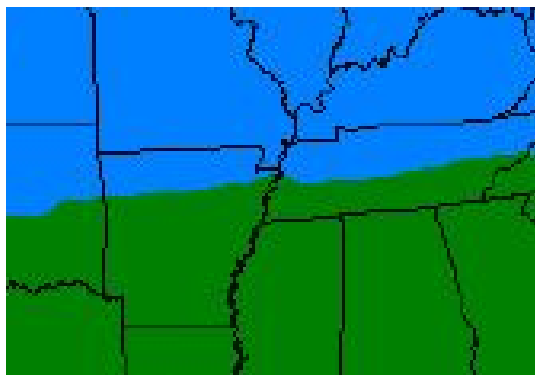


A map depicting the Köppen classification scheme is presented below:

The map is too small to be easily readable, but conveys the idea that Köppen identified a rather large number of climate types, each indicated on the map with its own color.

Any climate classification system is somewhat arbitrary, but this does not mean that the *concept* of climate has not been a useful one over the years. I should note, however, that the concept has been least useful in mountainous areas—

i.e., areas where significant vertical changes occur over a short distance—because such areas tend to have atmospheric characteristics unique to such areas. Second, it should be kept in mind that the boundary on a climate map between two climate types rarely represents a noticeable demarcation. For example, the [following map](#) of a part of the United States shows a green area and a blue area:



The green area represents a Humid Tropical climate, the blue a Humid Continental (Warm Summer) climate. Within Tennessee, e.g., both green and blue occur, indicating that a transition occurs within this state in climate type. At the green-blue boundary, however, there is no sharp break; rather, the one climate type grades into the other one.

A question at hand for this essay, however, is whether the very *concept* of climate is any longer useful—or at least is becoming *less* useful. I stated at the beginning that the concepts of “global warming” and “climate change” were misleading; let me now explain *why* that is so.

The term “global warming” is misleading because it suggests that the *only* atmospheric trend occurring at present is that the global mean temperature is tending to increase from year to year. Granted that from the perspective of geological time temperature change over time is nothing

new. But during the past few centuries there has been no significant trend in temperature change—until recently. But what the term “global warming” masks is that there have been atmospheric changes in recent years *in addition to* the trend in warming, and that those changes are also significant—so significant in consequences, in fact, that they warrant separate recognition. They include:

- An increase in the *number* of storms.
- An increase in the number of *severe* storms.
- Increased variability, from year to year, in the atmospheric conditions associated with any given some place (with there being variation between locations in this increased variability).

The latter fact is not only important for its potential consequences, but for its implications for the concept “climate.” For if we define “climate” briefly as “the usual weather of a place for any given year,” and what’s “usual” becomes less and less so over time, a point will be reached when the place can be said to *no longer have a climate!*

It is for this reason that I say that “climate change” is a misleading term. What the term *suggests* is that over time the lines on a climate map change in position, so that it can be said of a *given* location that it experiences “climate change.” The given location, that is, continues to *have* a climate, but at some point acquires a *different* one. This is not what’s occurring, however, which is why “climate change” is a poor term to use for what’s occurring. The fact of increasing variability is rendering the very concept of “climate” meaningless.

Given what is occurring, the term “trendular atmospheric depatternization” is a better descriptor of those events. The “trendular” alludes to a trend in increase in the global mean temperature, and the “depatternization” alludes to the fact of increasing variability, and consequent decreasing relevance of the concept of “climate.”

The *relevance* of understanding the nature of what is occurring is that such understanding can have profound implications for *adaptive* efforts. If one conceives the changes that occurring in terms of “climate change,” one will tend to downplay the importance of those changes from an adaptation perspective: “As changes occur, I can either learn to adapt to them by either moving to a ‘better’ location, or engage in *in situ* adaptation—and will have no problem doing so.”

If one conceives the changes occurring from a “global warming” standpoint, what one’s adaptation efforts will tend to overlook is the implications of (a) an increase in the number of storms, (b) the increase in the number of severe storms, and (c) increased variability.

In either case one will be making assumptions that are incorrect—assumptions that may impact one's survival seriously. To the point that one virtually ensures for oneself a premature death by one of a number of possible factors!

Boy Wonder

Alton C. Thompson

Most child “stars” attain that status because they have certain abilities (whether “natural” or acquired), and are “pushed” by their parents. The latter tends to occur not because the parents have the child’s best interests in mind but, rather, because the parents have a psychological need for publicity and fame, and strive to gain those through the child.

Some children gain fame, however, not because they—or their parents—have sought it, but because they have engaged in activities so extraordinary that those activities constitute “news.” And once *one* “news” organization writes, or broadcasts, a story about the child, other “news” organizations soon become aware of the story, and either further investigate it so that they can prepare their *own* stories, or simply repeat the original story.

The fame gained by [Noah Lamaide](#), a boy who lives with his parents in Stevens Point, Wisconsin (thirty-some miles from where I grew up), seems to be of this latter sort. Noah’s mother’s mother—Janice Sparhawk--had borrowed money to have a roofing job done on her house, but then found herself unable to work because of complications resulting from eye surgery, and a severe case of asthma. As a consequence, Janice was unable to make her mortgage payments, and foreclosure proceedings were begun, with an auction scheduled for February 15 of this year.

That auction didn’t occur, however—because 12-year-old grandson Noah entered the picture. Noah raised over \$10,000 on his grandmother’s behalf, thereby saving her from eviction.

This raises two questions:

- How did this boy acquire the *value system* that he has?
- How did a boy that young manage to raise so much money?

The answer to both questions lies partially with the grandmother herself. Over the years Janice had been involved in foster care for literally *hundreds* of local children, evidently. His mother said of Noah:

“He’s always putting others before himself, even as a little child,” Noah’s mother, Jill Sparhawk Lamaide, said. “I think he got it from seeing the foster kids come into my mom’s home. A majority of them said ‘I wish, I could be Noah.’”

Thus, simply by *observing* the helping nature of his grandmother, young Noah evidently learned that having concern for others was “just the right thing to do.”[1] In addition, however, Noah’s

mother played a role in the boy's moral development, for when Noah was 9, she challenged him to become involved in some sort of service project each year—and Noah rose to the challenge. For his ninth birthday Noah asked those invited to bring food for the local food pantry rather than presents for himself, his guests complied with that request—and they were able to collect a significant amount of food for a local food pantry! (I read some place that enough food was obtained to fill four grocery carts!)

When Noah was 10, with the help of his mother he established a [web site](#) to solicit money for causes, his first one being to raise money to send a woman (a family friend) with cancer, and her daughter, to Disneyland. Unfortunately, the woman died before Noah had accomplished his goal, but the dad and daughter were able to make that trip in late January of this year—with Noah's help. He was able to raise a significant amount of money in part because of his grandmother's reputation locally, in part because of his use of the internet—which enabled him to receive checks from distant places.

Noah doesn't see himself as any sort of hero, and has simply said, "It just makes me feel happy and like I did something to help the world." How proud his parents must be of this fine lad! Just thinking about this boy brings tears to my eyes.

As Noah enters his teen years, the pressures that he will face from peers may weaken his resolve to help others—but I hope that it doesn't. I hope, instead, that he is able to gain enough strength from his parents and his knowledge of the "rightness" of what he has been doing that he becomes a real force as a teen—and so inspires his fellow teens that many of them will choose to follow his example. Time will tell whether this occurs, of course. The pressures in our society for conformity are very powerful, and he may succumb to them.[2] However, if he is able to resist the pressures that he will face, he would be an ideal citizen for the New Society—and I hope that he survives to be one.

My reference here to a "New Society" has its basis in the projection by Prof. Kevin Anderson—an advisor to the British government on climate matters—that "global warming" will likely reduce the world's population to about 10% of what it is now within 50 years. That is a HUGE reduction, folks! And a sort of projection that you will not read about in the newspapers or popular magazines, and will not see discussed on television—for the simple (but perhaps non-obvious) reason that the energy companies and other interests that control the media are so short-sighted that they deny the reality of "climate change," and also promote (if but subtly) denial in others. Scientists know, however, that "global warming" is a serious problem that faces us humans at present, and some scientists—such as [Kevin Anderson](#) and [James Lovelock](#)—are so convinced on this matter that they have issued dire warnings about the future of our species.

Now if the world's population is severely culled within the next few decades, it follows that societies—with their intricate interactions—will become so disturbed by this culling and its various consequences, that they will collapse—leaving people to somehow fend for themselves. Something most will not be able to do, of course—and they will die prematurely from one cause or another.

However, those who anticipate this culling, and engage in adaptive activities will have a better chance of surviving than the average person. And, I should add that those who have long been pre-adapted for this “event”—for reasons other than deliberate planning (e.g., for religious reasons in the case, e.g., of the Amish)—will also have a good chance to survive.

What I'm hoping, in Noah's case, is that as he becomes older, he receives an education that enables him to adopt both a *societal* orientation, and an orientation to the *future*. It's highly likely that within the next 10 years the reality of “global warming” will be much more evident than it is now, and that Noah will be one of those who becomes aware that the only way “out” is to work at creating a New Society within the framework of the Existing Order. The New Society Movement needs people like him!

Endnotes

1. This raises the question: Why was his *grandmother* this way? Two clues suggest to me that her heritage is Native American, so that her value system simply reflects that heritage. First, her name—Sparhawk—sounds Native American. Second, the fact that the web site established for Noah by his mother has the word “[dreamcatcher](#)” in it, the fact that Noah sells dream catchers to raise money, and that “dream catchers” are associated with certain Native American cultures suggests that Sparhawk is a Native American.

It's clear, however, that Noah's inspiration also comes from Christianity. The January 9, 2012, entry on his web site is as follows:

God's instruction that we should serve others is unmistakable in Scripture. It's not a choice that we're given. It's a command. God charges us to reach out to those in need – in our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, in our cities and nation, and around the world.

In fact, God issues a specific call that we are to especially look out for “the least, the last, and the lost” – the marginalized and disadvantaged in our society. The widows, the orphans, the sick and the poor.

Did you know that there are over **2,000 verses** in the Bible that deal with God's view on justice & poverty? Verses like this one:

“Stand up for the poor and the orphan; advocate for the rights of the afflicted and those in need.”
Psalm 82:3 (The Voice)

I don't know who wrote this for his web site, but would guess that his mother did.

2. Eugene Linden, for example, has referred to the "screw your buddy" ethics of this society. *Affluence and Discontent*, 1979, p. 97.

[May 18, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/18/the-assault-on-truth/>]

The Assault on Truth

Alton C. Thompson

Here is a famous passage from the gospel of [John](#), Chapter 18:

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas [the Roman-appointed [Jewish high priest](#)] to the palace of the Roman governor[, [Pilate](#)—the then-Prefect, or governor, of Judaea]. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the [Passover](#). ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, “What charges are you bringing against this man?”

³⁰ “If he were not a criminal,” they replied [sarcastically!], “we would not have handed him over to you.”

³¹ Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.”

“But we have no right to execute anyone,” they objected. ³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” [evidently having been informed by the “Jewish leaders” that Jesus had made this claim about himself]

³⁴ “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” [obviously the latter, for how else would Pilate have learned this “fact” about Jesus?—a point made clear in the question that Pilate then asked Jesus:]

³⁵ “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

³⁶ Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

³⁷ “You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

³⁸ “What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me

to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

This story may have some basis in historical fact, but is likely mainly “just” a story—i.e., is basically fictional. Fiction can, however, present truths, and the above story is no exception. For I interpret Pilate’s “What is truth?” as a substitute for the question—a rhetorical one—that he *really* wanted to ask: “What does it *matter*, Jesus, if you are telling the truth? I am caught here between a rock and a hard place because of you. Even though your actions have presented no problems for *me* as Prefect of this province, if I let you go free, the Jewish leaders may incite a revolt against us Romans—and I don’t want that to happen. For my *own* sake, then, and for the good of the *Empire*, I am virtually forced to give my assent to what the Jewish leaders want done to you. I have no *desire* to see you crucified, but what *choice* do I have? In this real world that we live in, Jesus, having the *truth* on one’s side doesn’t count for much.”

Again, I am not claiming that the *historical* Pilate was thinking such thoughts prior to Jesus’s crucifixion, only that in this *story* I feel justified in imputing such thoughts to Pilate. The way I perceive Pilate in this story is that I perceive him as possibly being *somewhat* aware of what Jesus had been teaching, and even *agreeing*, to some degree, with the teachings that he had become aware of. As a consequence, he recognized that the charges that were being brought against Jesus were without merit, but that as a *political official* he needed not only to be concerned with the issue of guilt vs. innocence regarding *particular individuals*, but needed to consider the possible *impact* of his decisions on the situation in his *province*. For such impacts would have relevance not only for *his own* career, but for the continuation of “peace” (from a Roman perspective!) in the Empire.

As a citizen, I don’t envy our political leaders, for often in making decisions they need either to remain *silent* regarding what they are deciding, and why, or feel a need to *lie* about their decisions. I would like to believe that when our political leaders do the latter, they feel a twinge of guilt. However, because so often those who rise in our political system are (I fear) unscrupulous individuals for whom lying comes “natural,” I suspect that that twinges of guilt are rarely experienced in the higher reaches of our government. Some political leaders are “smoother” than others in not arousing suspicions about their integrity—e.g., I perceive Barack Obama (“O’Bomber” to some of us!) as smoother than Willard (Mitt) Romney. But I have little confidence for politicians in general—although I have worked in the office of my County Supervisor, and have worked in the campaigns of my State Assembly Representative and State Senator, and have not felt that I have compromised my principles in doing so.

My major complaint is with politicians at the *national* and *state* level—executive- and legislative-level politicians at the national level, executive-level politicians at the state level. The latter because as a resident of Wisconsin, I will soon be voting in the recall election of our current governor, [Scott Walker](#). Walker is being opposed by the current Milwaukee Mayor,

Thomas Barrett—with the former having already spent about **20 times as much** on the election as his opponent, because of receiving funding from wealthy individuals (such as the [Koch brothers](#) and [Sheldon Adelson](#)), and right-wing organizations (such as [ALEC](#) and the [Bradley Foundation](#)).

We Americans have become used to being bombarded with commercials as we watch television or listen to the radio, and to see billboard advertising as we travel down the highway. We are more able to ignore billboards than advertising on radio and television, but at least with television we have the ability to click the “Mute” button. Still, not only are commercials and advertisements annoying (some more so than others!—as some are actually fun to watch), they play with our minds. Which fact *is* objectionable.

An ironic aspect of our society is that on the one hand there are numerous scientists in our society who are interested in discovering truths, who upon discovering what they believe to be truths write reports of what they have discovered, have those reports peer-reviewed to ensure that they have not made any mistakes, and then get their reports published. The *importance* of those results may be questioned by some (who may criticize the “truths” being reported as esoteric, lacking in relevance), but the “truths” *themselves* are rarely questioned—except, perhaps, by some who lack the “credentials” to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, in our society there are many—especially individuals/organizations in business, and individuals in politics—for whom “truth” is a foreign word. Advertisements in support of a given political candidate (e.g., Governor Walker) may make statements that are true, but which are misleading. For example, there is an advertisement running locally (in Milwaukee) that notes that the unemployment rate in the city of Milwaukee has risen substantially during the mayoral term of Thomas Barrett. This may very well be a true statement, but the *implication* of the statement is that a *causal* relationship is involved—i.e., decisions by Barrett are the *one and only reason* why this rate has increased. The advertisement offers no *evidence* in support of a causal relationship, but those who had it prepared and paid for it obviously hope that the listener will *interpret* the advertisement to mean that. Other advertisements present outright falsehoods, of course—which is at least as objectionable.

When one is constantly bombarded with claims regarding commercial products—and, during certain periods, political candidates—one may respond to these claims in one of two ways:

- Is this given statement true, so that I should make it a part of my belief system?
- Does a given statement conform to my belief system, so that I should, then, accept it as “true”?

Note that we have here two very different concepts of “true.” In the first case one’s view is that if the statement is one that appears to be well-supported by empirical evidence, or is a logical conclusion from known truths, the person will accept it, and make it a part of his/her belief system. Such a person has a belief system that *evolves* over time; not only does it *expand*, it *changes* over time as the person sheds what s/he concludes is not true, and adds new truths to her/his belief system as those truths are learned.

In the second case the person develops a certain belief system over time, but at a certain point somehow “chooses” to *fix* his/her belief system at that stage of development. Statements encountered *after* that point are then assessed, not on the basis of their “*truthfulness*” but, rather, on the basis of their *conformance* with the person’s *belief system*.

I would *prefer* living in a society within which everyone was in the first category—but I recognize (sadly, I would add), that I don’t. And, I would prefer to live in a society within which people would not make claims that are either false or misleading—but, again, I recognize that I am not living in such a society. These facts are depressing—for many of us, at any rate. One can object to these facts for a variety of reasons, but my principal reason for being saddened—and angered, I must admit—about these facts is that with, e.g., Bill Henderson (see [this](#) and [this](#)) I believe that “global warming”—or what I call [Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization](#) (or TAD, illustrating the fact that I *do* have a sense of humor!)—(a) is now upon us, (b) cannot be halted, (c) will severely cull the world’s population within the next few decades[1], thereby (d) leaving us humans with the sole option of adapting, as best we can, to the changes that will be inevitably occurring.[2]

As a parent (a son and two daughters) and grandparent (three girls, one boy) I fear for their future—and for two reasons. On the one hand the energy companies keep pushing for the continued use of fossil fuels—on the basis that we need to strive for energy independence, and to help solve our country’s unemployment problem. Evidently the executives of these companies are not only in denial about TAD, but are able, in good conscience, to *preach* denial to the American public. Those facts, along with the fact that the energy companies—and other companies with a vested interest in the *status quo*—carry considerable weight with our political leaders on the national scale, suggests that one would have to be a fool to expect any leadership of an adaptational nature from our national government.

My second reason for fearing the future is that I feel so impotent in being able to *myself* do what I believe needs to be done—develop a program that would work for the proliferation of relatively self-sufficient eco-communities, so that the culling that will undoubtedly occur, will not be *quite* so severe. On the one hand I see myself as providing leadership for such an effort, but on the other hand have doubts about my competence for such a “job.” I have made some attempt to

attract funding for such a program, with myself at the helm, but so far have been unsuccessful—perhaps in part because I have not pursued the matter with vigor, being unsure of my ability to effectively provide leadership for such a program.

Perhaps I will be successful in this regard, perhaps I will not be. If the latter, I hope that at least *someone* emerges as a leader for such a movement. For the cause of saving humans is an important one—and I feel no need to offer *proof* in support of that claim!

Endnotes

1. Bill Henderson notes in the first of the two of his essays cited above that British scientist Kevin Anderson—an advisor to the British government on climate matters—believes it as entirely possible that the world’s population will be culled by 90%—I repeat, **90%**—within the next 50 years.
2. James Lovelock, in his most recent (and final?) book, [The Vanishing Face of Gaia](#), 2010, devotes Chapter 5 to “Geoengineering.” However, he admits in that chapter that he has little confidence in the ability of “geoengineering” to solve the problem of “global warming”/TAD.

[I should perhaps also mentioned that foundations, “think tanks,” the media, etc., have also played an important role in spreading misinformation and falsehoods, thereby affecting the beliefs of many in our society. As to the press (and more), see, e.g., [this](#).

I would think that when one encounters a statement that conflicts with one or more of one’s beliefs, whether the latter have firm support or not, one will experience [cognitive dissonance](#). This might be especially true if one “knows” (at least at a subconscious level) that the level is true, but that it conflicts with one’s beliefs. I would also think that the more conflict one experiences here, the more would one be a candidate for one or more mental disorders. I don’t think that it was necessary to bring any of this into the essay, however.]

The Linguistic Solution to Our Problems

Alton C. Thompson

Who would have thunk it?! It has recently been discovered that certain linguistic innovations have the *inherent* ability to address some of our problems as humans. All that is required, by us, is to *create*, and then *publicize* them. The new terms will then work their magic, in some mysterious way, and somehow address some of our most vexing problems. (Actually, I am being more than a little facetious here—but hope that I have caught your attention!)

What are some examples of these magical terms? Here are a few: “treasure impulse,” “sustainable consumption,” “livelihood chain,” and “elemental accounting”—all of them terms introduced by [Saleem Hassan Ali](#), a Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of Vermont. Commenting in detail on the *meanings* of these new terms is beyond the scope of this essay, but let me briefly comment on “treasure impulse.”

According to [Ali](#), “greed is not bad,” being associated with our “treasure impulse.” This is a seemingly startling point to make about greed, which causes one to ask at least three questions:

- What is the *common* meaning of “greed”?
- Does Ali’s meaning for the word *coincide* with this common meaning?
- If not, *how* does it differ from the common meaning? And related to this: Does that meaning differ so *substantially* from the common meaning that “greed” should *not* be the label attached to Ali’s meaning—and that Ali’s doing so should be *sanctioned*? That Ali’s invention here, rather than being *enlightening*, is *obfuscating*.

Here is the [common meaning](#) given to “greed”:

Greed is the inordinate desire to possess wealth, goods, or objects of abstract value with the intention to keep it for one's self, far beyond the dictates of basic survival and comfort. It is applied to a markedly high desire for and pursuit of wealth, status, and power.

As commonly defined, then, “greed” refers to an irrational desire to obtain as much wealth (or status, fame, power) as one can, a drive utterly detached from basic need satisfaction, and with no thought whatsoever of one’s sharing any of that wealth with others (except perhaps family members). One whose behavior is dominated by greed is so self-oriented that s/he pursues wealth using whatever means will be effective—within the law (the greedy individual often, however, using his/her wealth, and thereby influence, to effectuate changes in the law that will ensure that his/her actions *are* legal!)

What does “greed” mean to Ali? Ali perceives “greed” as part of our (what he calls) “treasure impulse.” Evidently Ali believes that this “impulse” is one that we are all born with, and that this impulse directs us to collect and consume, on the one hand, and to innovate and discover, on the other hand. Ali implies that it would be pointless to apply value judgments to any of these four tendencies, because if a given tendency is “natural,” it follows that that tendency is simply “there,” it is not something that is *chosen* (i.e., involves free will). Ali also implies that we humans are unable to *control* our tendency to, e.g., collect, so that our destiny is to attempt (non-cognitively—being, rather, *driven* to act) to collect as much as we can, to consume as much as we can, etc. How does “greed” enter the picture here? There is no clear answer to that question provided in the source that I am using here (cited above), but to answer the second question that I posed above, I would say “No!”

What Ali seems to saying is that humans have four basic “drives”—to collect, consume, innovate, and discover—and that they have a common thread: All involve *doing*. The first two involve movement, physical activity, as does the fourth. The third drive, however, is of a different sort in that, although it involves activity, that activity is of a *mental* sort. Often, though, that mental activity involves ideas for *creating* new things, or *modifying* the characteristics of existing things, which ideas, in being implemented, result in the creation/modification of things—which then become *associated with* the activities of collection, consumption, and discovery.

We *have* these drives because they are necessary for our survival (their presence in us having been ensured by evolutionary forces); and our *innovation* activity occurs because of our highly developed brain, with the resulting innovations *contributing* to our survival.

I realize that I have been attributing ideas to Ali using a rather shaky basis for so doing. Perhaps if I were more familiar with his work (beyond the article by Naazish YarKhan that I have been using) I would have a clearer idea of what he means by “treasure impulse” and “greed.” From YarKhan’s article, however, I have to conclude that:

- The meaning that he gives to “greed” seems to have little in common with the common meaning (quoted above).
- Just as creating the word “unicorn” doesn’t result in actual unicorns appearing on the scene, so creating “treasure impulse” will not result in such an impulse magically arising with us humans.

If Ali is introducing “treasure impulse” to refer to a group of tendencies—namely, to collect, consume, innovate, and discover—he owes us the courtesy of providing us with a *rationale* for placing these four tendencies in a single group. First, though, he needs to establish the *existence* of these tendencies (as “drives” with a biological basis). Until he does that, I see no reason to add his “treasure impulse” to the language.

Ali's colleague at the University of Vermont, Thomas Hudspeth, has used the term "brave thinking" in conjunction with Ali, Ali has been named a "young global leader" by the World Economic Forum, a "green giant" by *The Observer Magazine*, and among eight "revolutionary minds in the world" by *Seed* magazine. And a "Google" search on "Saleen Ali" returns about 7, 420, 000 "hits"! No one can doubt, then, that Ali is an important player on the world scene at present. Although Ali was born in Massachusetts, his heritage is Pakistani, and he spent some of his youth in Pakistan. As YarKhan notes about this, Ali credits that experience "with his love of bringing together diverse ideas to produce something new."

However, I have a reservation about Ali in addition to those mentioned above. Before identifying it, though, let me quote this from YarKhan's article:

When the un-mandated University of Peace, founded in Costa Rica in 1980, wanted to develop a curriculum called *Peace Education: Islamic Perspectives*, Amr Abdalla, professor and vice rector, came to Ali. "A wide population of Muslims relies to a great extent on their understanding of their religion to guide all aspects of their lives. We see no contradiction between Islam and disciplines such as peace, conflict and environment," says Abdalla.

(Please note here that "un-mandated" should be "UN-mandated"—i.e., mandated by the United Nations. The meanings of these two terms are very different!)

The fact that Amr Abdalla contacted Ali for help in developing his *Peace Education: Islamic Perspectives* tells me that Ali is not so "Westernized" that he feels that religion should be segregated from public life—and I congratulate him for this, for I share such a belief (as indicated in, e.g., my "[NeWFism](#): A Religion for the Twenty-First Century"). Not that governments should support certain religions, but that those in public life should not feel that they must "forget" their religious beliefs. My only caution here—and I assume that Ali would agree with me on this point—is that those in public office must be careful not to infringe on the religious beliefs/practices of others—a principle which, though, can be difficult to follow as recent history here in the United States (regarding the abortion issue and the Catholic Church) has demonstrated.

As to my major reservation regarding Ali's ideas, I perceive in him no serious worry about what (used to be called) "global warming" (and is now called [TAD](#)!) may do to our species. As Bill Henderson has noted (see the two citations in [this](#)), British scientist Kevin Anderson—an advisor to the British government on climate matters—has projected as highly likely a severe culling of the world's population within the next 50 years. A culling so *utterly* severe that within that period of time **90%** of the world's people will be dying prematurely!

As a highly-educated person, Ali *must* be aware of the fact that scientists such as Anderson, James Lovelock, and James Hansen have, during the past few years, been warning us about this possibility. Given that if that severe culling occurs (as it surely will!), societies will disintegrate, and chaos will erupt throughout the world, one would think that Ali would have given this possibility serious attention. Evidently he hasn't, however. (:

This is especially unfortunate given that a person with his stature could play an important role in saving at least some of the world's population from this calamity.

Addendum

When one is involved in summarizing/critiquing the work of someone whose works one lacks much familiarity, one runs the risk of misrepresenting the person's ideas. In the case of the present essay about Saleem H. Ali, I have never read anything *by* him, and have read only one article *about* him. As a consequence, I risked misinterpretation, but took that risk. My view in limiting my attention to the one source is the judgment that any work—even an essay—should be relatively self-contained, so that one can understand its “message” without needing to consult a number of other works by the author. Of course, in this case the article that I had used as my source was written by someone other than himself, thereby increasing the odds that I would misinterpret him.

I realized this as a potential problem, and therefore sent an email to Prof. Ali (saleem.ali@uvm.edu), and invited him to comment on my essay prior my to sending it to www.bravenewworld.in. He sent the following response, and gave me permission to attach it to my essay. I glad that he did, because I think it only fair that he have an opportunity to defend/explain himself.

Prof. Ali did not provide me with a detailed commentary at this point, but seems to have promised to do so later. If he does, I hope that he sends it to this site. You will note that the “interview” that I had used as my sole source is not, according to Ali, “fully representative of my arguments.” He went on to note that his point of view is better expressed in his *Treasures of the Earth: Need, Greed, and a Sustainable Future* book (2009).

I was heartened by Ali's statements that he is “very concerned about climate change,” and his view that “mitigation is now futile within our political system and we will have to focus far more on adaptation strategies” I am anxious to know what he has in mind regarding “adaptation strategies,” and will need to contact him in the near future to find out where, specifically, he discusses “adaptation strategies.” I *do* wish, however, that the “interview” that I had used as my source had made *some* reference to Prof. Ali's views on global warming. The fact that such views were not presented assumedly suggests that he was never *asked* for his views! However, another plausible explanation is that the periodical for which the interview was prepared was not interested in publicizing Prof. Ali's views on the matter!!

Dear Al

Thanks for taking the time to write and respond.

The interview on which you are basing your review is not fully representative of my arguments.

You are welcome to interpret these as you consider appropriate but would suggest you read my book "[Treasures of the Earth](#)" [link added by me—ACT I] first.

I am indeed very concerned about climate change -- the issue is one of how we respond. In my view mitigation is now futile within our political system and we will have to focus far more on adaptation strategies and for that our "treasure impulse" will be a fruitful way to proceed.

I won't be able to write a response right away but in due course can address your article.

Kind regards
Saleem

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[May 21, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/21/societal-change-planned-or-incidental/>]

Societal Change: Planned or Incidental?

Alton C. Thompson

Societal change usually—but not always—results from decision-making by individuals, with some individuals having more impact than others, of course. At times societal change occurs in response to *conscious* plans for change. More commonly, however, societal change occurs as an *unintended consequence* of planned—or, perhaps even more often—*unplanned* changes. And, of course, the societal changes that occur can be of either a positive or a negative nature, so far as the “general welfare” is concerned.

The term “drift” might be applied to societal change of an unplanned nature; and although columnist (for <http://www.truthdig.com/>) Chris Hedges does not use that term in [discussing](#) recent changes in our society, the changes that he describes would seem to fit that label. Specifically, however, Hedges refers to our society as having been “colonized”—by corporations. That is, just as in the past powerful countries have colonized (i.e., invaded and then exploited) weaker countries for the former’s advantage, so in recent years have corporations in this country been “colonizing” those of us in the “99%.”

The “colonizing” corporate entities “have no loyalty to the nation and indeed in the language of traditional patriotism are traitors [!!].” What their colonizing *involves*, for the 99% is:

- They steal our resources.
- They keep us politically passive.
- They enrich themselves at our expense.

They are *enabled* to do the above by virtue of the facts that:

- They deny us job security.
- They ensure that incomes “are reduced to subsistence level,” and thereby plunge us into a situation of desperation.
- They work at dismantling mass movements, such as labor unions.
- They degrade the school system “so only the elites have access to superior education.”
- “Laws are written to legalize corporate plunder and abuse, as well as criminalize dissent.”

- The “ensuing fear and instability—keenly felt this past weekend by the more than 200,000 Americans who lost their unemployment benefits—ensure political passivity by diverting all personal energy toward survival. It is an old, old game.”

Yes, it is an “old game,” but for those of us who grew up believing that America held some sort of [promise](#) for us, recent trends have been a bitter pill to swallow.

Hedges, however, sees two recent trends as having promise for “a better tomorrow.” One is the Occupy movement, which “expresses the widespread disgust with the elites, and the deep desire for justice and fairness” He asserts that the “Occupy movement will change and mutate, but it will not go away. It may appear to make little headway, but this is less because of the movement’s ineffectiveness and more because decayed systems of power have an amazing ability to perpetuate themselves through habit, routine[,] and inertia.” He adds, perceptively: “The press and organs of communication, along with the anointed experts and academics, tied by money and ideology to the elites, are useless in dissecting what is happening within these movements. They view reality through the lens of their corporate sponsors. They have no idea what is happening.”

A second trend that gives Hedges some measure of optimism is the “fact” (per him) that “our corporate regime *is* dying.” Signs that this is the case, according to Hedges, include the following:

- Members of the elite are becoming demoralized. More and more of them are coming to “understand that the system that enriches and empowers them is corrupt and decayed.”
- As a consequence, they “become cynical. They do not govern effectively. They retreat into hedonism. They no longer believe their own rhetoric.”
- “They devote their energies to stealing and exploiting as much, as fast, as possible. They pillage their own institutions, as we have seen with the newly disclosed loss of \$2 billion within JPMorgan Chase, the meltdown of Chesapeake Energy Corp. [,] or the collapse of Enron and Lehman Brothers.”
- “The elites become cannibals. They consume each other.”
- “A dying ruling class, in short, no longer acts to preserve its own longevity.”
- Loss of faith on the part of the elite “means that when it comes time to use force, the elites employ it haphazardly and inefficiently, in large part because they are unsure of the loyalty of the foot soldier on the streets charged with carrying out repression.”

As one who has had varied experiences and has traveled widely, [Chris Hedges](#) has had an opportunity to witness societal change elsewhere up close, and that experience, in conjunction with his reading of, e.g., Robert E. Gamer’s *The Developing Nations* (1982) has led him to

conclude, first, that the “most effective revolutions, including the Russian Revolution, have been largely nonviolent.” (In stating this he went on to note that “[Peter Kropotkin](#)[,] during the Russian Revolution[,] condemned the radical terrorists, asserting that they only demoralized and frightened away the movement’s followers[,] and discredited authentic anarchism.”) (By the way, Kropotkin has long been one of my heroes!)

Second, Hedges has come to conclude that the “danger the corporate state faces does not come from the poor. The poor . . . do not mount revolutions, although they join them and often become cannon fodder.” The element in the population that, rather, represents the most *serious* threat to the elite is *déclassé intellectuals*, “those educated middle-class men and women who are barred by a calcified system from advancement. Artists without studios or theaters, teachers without classrooms, lawyers without clients, doctors without patients[,] and journalists without newspapers descend economically. They become, as they mingle with the underclass, a bridge between the worlds of the elite and the oppressed. And they are the dynamite that triggers revolt.”

Hedges’s key argument here (relative to the second point) is that “What fosters revolution is not misery, but the gap between what people expect from their lives and what is offered. This is especially acute among the educated and the talented. They feel, with much justification, that they have been denied what they deserve. They set out to rectify this injustice. And the longer the injustice festers, the more radical they become.”

The implication here, of course, is that *déclassé intellectuals* in the United States will, at some point (soon?), become so disgusted with the Existing Order and their (“inferior”) place in that Order that they will revolt—precipitate a revolution in this country, and, he hopes, one that is peaceful. This suggests, for me, two questions, however:

- Is a “revolution,” as Hedges conceives it (which, though, is not very clear!) *likely*?
- If it is *not* likely, does this mean that we have no reason to be optimistic?

I stated at the beginning that much societal change occurs as a *byproduct* of decisions that have some other intent. Let me now supply an example of such change—change that is likely for the *future*, rather than change that has *occurred*—and argue that it is *this* that should “occupy” our minds rather than the possibility of, and hope for, “revolution”:

- Various developments (which I will not elaborate on here) have occurred during the past few centuries that have resulted in the increased use of fossil fuels.
- Related developments have resulted in a vast increase in the world’s population—which currently stands at about 7 billion.

- The burning of fossil fuels results in “greenhouse” gases being emitted into the atmosphere.
- Such gases “trap” the long-wave heat energy that then emanates from earth.
- The result of that is what was formerly called “global warming,” and is now (by some of us, at any rate!) called [Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization](#), or TAD.
- Within the next 50 years TAD may very well result in the premature deaths of 90% of the world’s current population. (See this [essay](#) by Bill Henderson, in which he refers to British scientist Kevin Anderson, an advisor to the British government on climate matters.)
- As that culling occurs, a point will be reached when all societies—including ours, most certainly!—will begin to disintegrate, and eventually collapse.

What this latter (very strong) possibility suggests is that the déclassé intellectuals in our midst (is Hedges one of them?!) should first recognize this possibility, and then also recognize that it is too late to halt TAD, so that the only choice that we humans have at present is to attempt to adapt, as best we can, to the changes that will inevitably occur as TAD advances.

I’m sure that a number of good ideas currently exist, and will soon be created, as to how to proceed, from an adaptational standpoint. However, only two options occur to me at present, both of which involve self-sufficiency (given that as our society breaks down, if one is not able to provide for one’s own basic needs, one will be doomed—as the disruptions that occur in our economy will become so severe that one will “be on one’s own”):

- Homesteading, as an individual or family (in which case the appropriate terms would be “self-sufficiency” and “family-sufficiency”).
- Joining with others to create an eco-community at a location safe from TAD (insofar as one can plan on the “progress” of TAD), and safe from the hordes of people who have *not* planned on TAD’s occurrence, and, in desperation, are wandering around looking for food. (In this case “community-sufficiency” would be the appropriate term.)

I will not hazard a guess as to how many déclassé intellectuals live in the United States at present, but it is such individuals who are best “equipped” to recognize the threat posed by TAD, and then act appropriately. My hope is that they will *do* so! And ASAP!

If such individuals begin—and soon—to realize that there are more important things for them to do than participate in the Occupy movement—namely, that what’s important for them to do is to begin building a New Society within the framework of the Existing Order—their efforts will not—they must realize in advance—prevent a terrible *loss* of human life, as TAD “progresses.”

Their efforts likely will, however, result in a significant *saving* of human life, and that's what will make their efforts worthwhile.

Imagining the Future (and other matters)

Alton C. Thompson

During my nearly 25 years of employment with my current employer, I have taken the bus most of the time. Initially, I had only to walk a few blocks to the nearest bus stop, and would take the bus to a certain point, and then walk the rest of the way (about 13 blocks), using the rationale that the walking would be good for my health. Then the route that I was using was discontinued, and I was forced to drive 2 miles to a different bus route, which I then took to a certain point, and then walked the rest of the way (about 5 blocks), again under the “theory” that the more walking I did, the better my health would be.

About a year ago, however, I started to experience pain in my left leg (the sciatic nerve), and my primary physician recommended that I see a physical therapist—which I did, for a few sessions. I guess I was too impatient with the lack of progress that I was making with her, and so I then—making this decision without any professional help—I quit that therapy and started sessions with a chiropractor. My insurance would cover only 20 sessions, and I had 20 sessions—but felt no better after those 20 sessions than when I began. I then “hit” on the idea that acupuncture might be my answer, and made an appointment with a Chinese gentleman who had been practicing acupuncture for 45 years; he was conveniently located relative to my place of employment. After seeing him for 3 sessions (which my insurance didn’t cover!), and without any noticeable improvement, I stopped seeing him.

After a short “break” I decided that I might achieve relief from a physical therapist after all, and began to have sessions with therapists (3 in all) at a facility fairly close to my place of residence. As my insurance would pay (partially) for 12 sessions, I had 12 sessions, and felt that my “condition” had improved somewhat, but not enough. The main therapist that I had been seeing then recommended a Pain Management specialist, with whom I then made an appointment. My first appointment was of an exploratory nature, with the doctor writing an order for an MRI to be done on my lower back. This doctor impressed me as a person who “knew what he was doing;” and a “connection” with him was established in learning that he had attended both the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Aix-en-Provence in southern France—just as my older daughter had (attending the latter as a Senior). (Small world!)

I had my MRI (at a different facility) the next week, and then the day after that had an early-morning appointment with the Pain Management specialist, who gave me an injection (I will have another 2 weeks from then). Although my pain did not go away completely, it lessened considerably. As a consequence, although several months ago the pain had reached a point where I was forced to drive to work rather than take a bus, I now felt enough relief from my pain

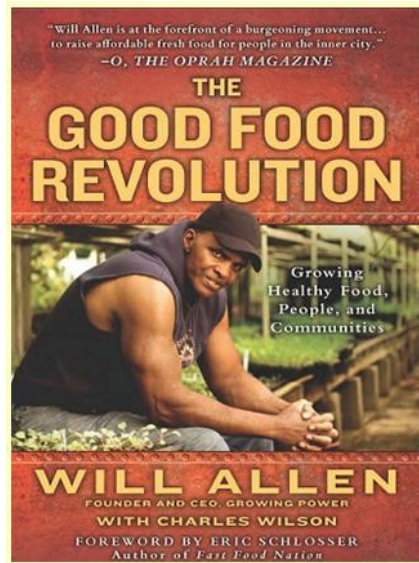
to resume my bus riding—which I then did. As bus riding does not require one to focus on the surrounding traffic, this return to bus riding gave me an opportunity to see Milwaukee as I had not been seeing it while driving to and from work. And because I have been thinking of the implications of [TAD](#) recently, I began to ask myself: If I were to be here in, say, 40 years (unlikely, given that I am 72 at present!), what would Milwaukee be like then? (By the way, I live in a suburb to the southwest of the City of Milwaukee, and work at a location on the north side of the city. Thus, my bus ride allows—no forces!—me to see the Milwaukee urban area in much of its variety.)

As I try to imagine how the future will be here in 40 years, the factor that as perceive as particularly of importance is that of TAD. Before proceeding, I should note that I have featured TAD in many of my previous essays on this web site, and have argued that (a) it's too late to halt the changes associated with TAD; (b) therefore, we should strive to adapt as best we can to the changes that will inevitably be occurring, and (c) that adaptation should take the form of creating a New Society. I would now add that even if the sources that I have cited turn out to be wrong regarding the *pace* at which TAD will proceed, I see no reason for recanting on my belief that TAD will *continue* to occur. For my solution—societal system change—can be argued for on bases *other* than TAD—as a possible solution (if the societal system change is accomplished “properly”) to most, if not all, of our societal problems, a partial list of which would include the following:

- In our society “democracy” is becoming a word with a hollow meaning, as money is coming to take precedence over people (including money from organizations such as [AIPAC](#), which essentially lobby for the interests of a foreign government).
- Imperialism, with its military adventurism.
- Inequality in income, and therefore life chances.
- Un-, under-, and mal-employment.
- Poverty.
- Housing foreclosures.
- Homelessness
- Unaffordable medical care.
- Gender inequality.
- Homophobia.
- Racism.
- Spousal/child abuse.
- Teenage pregnancies.
- Bullying.
- Crime—especially corporate crime that is, however, “legal.”
- Robberies, physical assaults.
- Drug/alcohol abuse.
- Gambling.

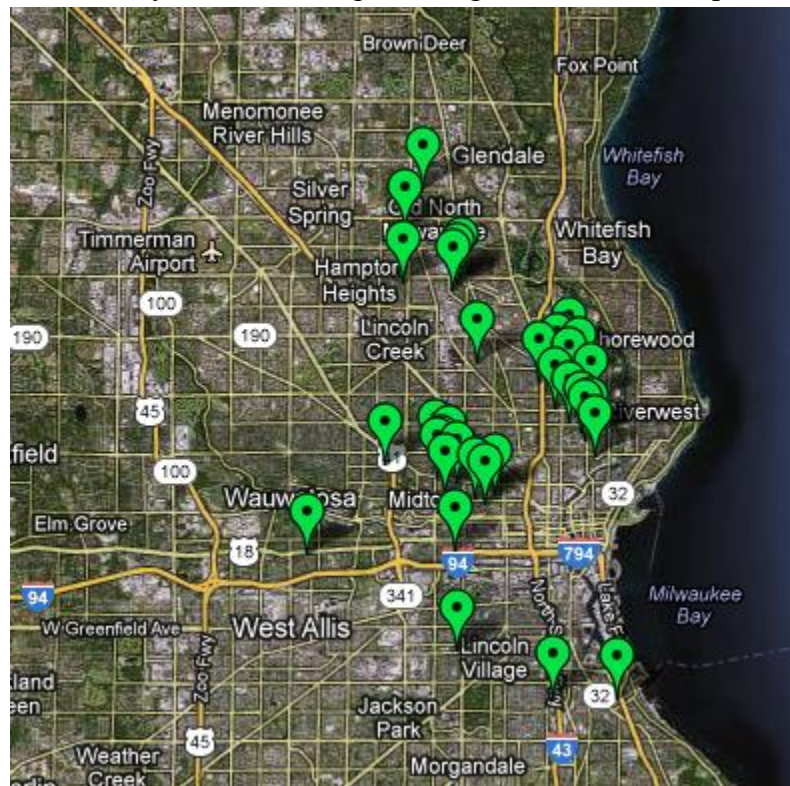
Thus, although I will continue to believe that TAD is a problem, and will become more of a problem over time; and although I will remain open to new scientific findings regarding TAD; I use my *current* beliefs about TAD—especially the belief, borrowed from British scientist Kevin Anderson—that within the next 50 years, 90% of the world’s population will be culled by TAD as a basis for this essay. (See, e.g., [this essay](#) by Bill Henderson.)

Along with this assumption regarding what TAD will do to the human population over the next few decades, I also assume that the potential of urban gardening will not achieve its potential by, say, 2050. In my “[Confronting the Future](#)” essay I referred to a Will Allen here in Milwaukee,



and noted that he had initiated a program called “Growing Power.” Recently Will wrote (with some assistance) a book ([The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities](#). New York: Gotham Books, 2012.

(Published by Penguin Group (USA) Inc.) on this effort; and on the basis of this and other local efforts, one might expect that by 2050 Milwaukee would have become rather “community-sufficient” in producing food. As [this](#) map,



produced by Milwaukee Urban Gardens indicates, there are, at present, many urban gardens in Milwaukee. However, here I will assume that as TAD proceeded between now and 2050, whatever expansion in urban gardening that occurred was insufficient for the needs of Milwaukee’s residents.

Using, then, the assumptions that TAD will proceed according to Prof. Anderson’s projection, in conjunction with the assumption that urban gardening will lag behind the need for its expansion, I make the following projections regarding Milwaukee in 2050:

1. I (*if* I am living in 2050, that is!) would not be able to take the bus, because no buses would be running. In fact, the streets would be largely empty—because few people would be living in Wisconsin at that time, and fewer still would be living in Milwaukee.
2. Most of the houses that I now pass to and from my way to work will stand vacant, with many of them having rotting corpses inside.
3. The stores in shopping centers, along with all free-standing retail/service units, would be lacking customers—because there would be too few people around to keep them in business. Besides, even if there *were* potential customers, the stores/service establishments would not be able to obtain anything to sell. On the one hand, little if anything was being produced for sale, and except for travel by water, transportation would be made difficult because of a lack of fuel to power vehicles.
4. No manufacturing would be occurring in any of the manufacturing plants, because it would be virtually impossible to obtain the “raw” materials required, few if any workers would be available—and there would be no market to sell to anyway.

I suppose that much more could be said, but I think that I have said enough to convey the “picture” that I anticipate in 2050. I expect that a few urban residents would be able to survive the TAD “holocaust,” but believe that those most likely to survive would be those living in rural areas. This would include the Amish, of whom Wisconsin has many. It might include some small farmers who have, over the years, focused more on “production for local consumption”—namely their *own* consumption—than on producing for “the market.” And should include those who have anticipated the “progress” of TAD, and have either become homesteaders, or joined with like-minded others in establishing cooperative eco-communities.

I am certainly not *wishing* that this picture of Milwaukee will develop (no pun intended—which is a lie, of course!). However, my reading in the “climate change”—i.e., TAD—literature has convinced me that the above picture is entirely within the realm of possibility. And as I stated earlier, I remain convinced that even if climate scientists start “changing their tune,” the solution that I offer—that of societal system change—should *still* be regarded as one that should be implemented. If not because of TAD, then because of its potential for solving all, or virtually so, our other problems in this society.

Those living in other countries will, of course, need to make their own decisions as to whether to take TAD seriously, and if so, how to respond. What we do here can serve as model for other countries, just as what is done in other countries can serve as a model for us. However, if TAD proceeds “according to plan,” those surviving to, say, 2060, will be presented with difficulties in communicating with others over long distances.

[May 24, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/24/recovering-our-evolutionary-past/>]

[Sufyan had notified me that he liked this essay so much that he wanted to make it the 1000th essay on his site—and he did!]

Recovering our Evolutionary Past

Alton C. Thompson

Yesterday (May 20, 2012) I participated in the ritual of Holy Communion—or [Eucharist](#), as it is referred to by some—at the Presbyterian church that I attend, but could not help thinking of what Bruce Chilton had suggested in his [The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program Within a Cultural History of Sacrifice](#) (1992). What Chilton had implied—without, however, stating this explicitly—was that Jesus had instituted, with his disciples (and perhaps even beyond that circle), the ritualistic eating of bread and drinking of wine—as *substitutes* for offering sacrifices (contrary to what the descriptions of a [Last Supper](#) suggest).

Now if *this* is what Jesus intended with his ritualistic use of bread and wine, this has at least two implications. First, Christians have, over the centuries, utterly misinterpreted Jesus's intent—having the excuse, however, that the written sources upon which they have based their ritual have been in serious error. Second, if in fact Jesus used, in a ritualistic way, bread and wine as substitutes for sacrifices, and taught that this was more pleasing to God than offering sacrifices, this would have gotten him in trouble with the Jewish leaders: On the one hand, they would have regarded this as *blasphemy*; on the other hand, they would have perceived this as a *threat* to their position in the society—rendering them irrelevant, were this practice to become common. Either way, this gave them a motive to rid Palestine of this “heretic,” and may have been the root cause of their instigating his execution, by the Romans, by crucifixion.

In returning home from church, I began to think about the nature of ritual *per se*. It occurred to me that, so far as *religious* rituals are concerned, at any rate, many seem to think of rituals from an *individualistic* perspective (not surprising in our society!), and think of them as having *causal efficacy*. That is, when they participate in a ritual, what's going through their mind is: “In my participating in this ritual, it will *do* something for *me*. It will, e.g., ensure that I will enter Heaven upon my death—which is why I must participate in this ritual on a regular basis.”

This interpretation of the purpose of rituals strikes me as simply wrongheaded. What occurred to me, as I was thinking about rituals, is that they serve two functions. On the one hand, if one participates in a ritual as a member of a group, this can—and usually will—give one a sense of *solidarity* with the other members of the group. Because of this, one will develop a sense of affection for the others in the group, and therefore will be willing to socialize with them—as equals—and also be willing to work with them, in a cooperative manner, toward common goals.

On the other hand, participating in a ritual, will give one a sense of *continuity* with the group. Given this, one will “naturally” want to possess some knowledge of the group’s history—how it began, what its purpose(s) is (are), how it has changed over time, and the prospects for its future. Regarding this latter point, one will be motivated to think about what one might do in the future, acting either as an individual or as a member of the group; and insofar as one gets the latter sort of ideas, one will be motivated to bring them to the attention of some, or all, of the other members of the group, with those individuals then discussing the ideas, and arriving at a decision either to act, or not act, on the ideas.

If the latter is chosen, this likely will reinforce whatever feelings of solidarity already exist in the group. Of course, if discussions do *not* involve the entire group, and if only a few are given an opportunity to speak, “hard feelings” may develop within the group, and the group itself may become fragmented into several groups—so that either “factions” are formed within the group, or the group separates into several subgroups that cease having contact one with another.

I wasn’t satisfied just *thinking* about ritual, and decided that I should also do some *reading* about it. I then “googled” “ritual” and found a [brief discussion](#) of the subject. What especially caught my interest in reading that article was reference to some of the ideas expressed by [Joseph Jordania](#) (1954 -), an ethno musicologist/evolutionary musicologist who was born in Georgia (the one that was previously a part of the U.S.S.R.), but who now lives in Australia. I must confess that I had never heard of Jordania before yesterday, and thus have never read anything by him. But in reading about him on Google, I found some of his ideas fascinating—in part because of my interest in music, in part because of my interest in evolution. Thus, relying solely on the Google article, I will briefly discuss some of Jordania’s ideas here (ignoring those that I have no interest in), and conclude by relating them to some of my own ideas.

In a book published last year—[Why Do People Sing? Music in Human Evolution](#)—Jordania notes that although there are over 5,000 singing species living in trees throughout the world, only *one* land species sings—the human species! This fact provides additional proof for the (widely agreed-upon) thesis that our ancestors had been tree-dwellers; in addition, however, the fact that our ancestors were singers became a factor in our evolution, per Jordania.

From previous reading I had learned that those of our ancestors who survived (and therefore were among those to produce progeny) tended to be those most able to escape predators[1]—i.e. those most adept at assuming an upright posture (with long legs also being a survival factor), and those who were living in groups.[2] I had never, however, heard the thesis that our ancestors had been *singers*, and that this had provided them with a survival advantage.

What role did singing have in our evolution? Jordania first notes some of the problems that our ancestors faced, from a survival perspective:

- They lacked characteristics that would give them [crypsis](#)—an ability to avoid detection, given their size, coloration, inability to be stealthy (i.e., they were noisy), etc.
- They lacked an ability to run swiftly.
- They were unable to use their teeth to fight back.
- They lacked a tough hide, and therefore were unable “to withstand even a moderate predator offense.”

How to “work around” those limitations? Jordania lists several possible “strategies” (beyond that of group living):

- An upright posture, by making one appear larger than one actually was, may have enabled one to frighten predators away.
- Body painting may have had the same effect.
- The “initial use of clothes was to intimidate and confuse predators and competitors with unusual appearance, and at the same time to contribute to the psychological transformation of group members. As there is evidence that humans might have been using clothes about 3.5 million years ago, Jordania suggested that clothes were not needed for environmental protection while humans lived in Africa.”
- “According to Jordania, early hominids became . . . masters of throwing rocks and other objects. Aimed throwing as a means of hunting has been proposed by William H. Calvin. Jordania proposes that early hominids were using throwing primarily for defense, not hunting.”
- Vocalizations—e.g., in the form of music (and associated with this the use of rhythmic dancing).

The latter suggestion is of particular interest because Jordania presents the thesis that our ancestors used music as an adaptive strategy.[3] The sounds made by our ancestors themselves may have helped ward off predators, but the point that Jordania emphasizes is that *polyphonic* music (i.e., music sung in “choir-like” fashion) has the potential of putting hominids into an *altered state of consciousness*, and he uses the term “battle trance” for that state. The “battle” that he is referring to here, of course, is not battle with another hominid group but, rather, a “battle” with predators. Jordania’s argument here is that polyphonic music, by putting those who are singing it, into an *altered state of consciousness*, the individuals participating will not feel fear or pain, and will be able to follow the group’s leader to address the problem presented by the presence of a predator. Thereby, their ability to repel the predator will be enhanced, along with their ability to chase predators away from a kill that they have accomplished.

If nothing else, this thesis is a brilliant—and interesting—one. Jordania’s ideas are, however, controversial, and the final section of the Google article identifies areas of disagreement between Jordania and other experts. (My primary criticism is that he gives “natural selection” a role in our evolution, but not sexual selection, however. I would argue that natural selection (as defined by Charles Darwin) played no role whatsoever in our evolution, the key factors being, rather, environmental change, predation, and sexual selection. I do, however, find convincing his argument that “the use of ritualized rhythmic dancing, body painting[,] and group singing became the basis of the future religious ritual practices.”)

I have used “Recovering Our Evolutionary Past” for my title here because in a recent [essay](#) I argued for the desirability of music, but without providing much of a rationale. Now, however, I would say that Jordania’s research and (especially) reasoning give one an ability to argue that we became “designed” for music while we were evolving. Thus, to urge the importance of music is to argue, in effect, that because we became “designed” to sing, and, later to develop and then learn to play, musical instruments, being involved with music is simply a part of our evolutionary heritage.

Although in advocating [NeWFism](#) as a religion for the twenty-first century I was promoting something closer to the dialogical procedure associated with [Socrates](#) [c 469 BCE – 399 BCE][4] than something that Jordania associated with religion’s origin (i.e., ritualized dancing, group singing), what Jordania associated with group singing—an altered state of consciousness—is also something that I associate with the NeWF. On p. 50 ff. of my “[Worship](#): An Exercise in Revisioning” I discuss a number of possible consequences of NeWF participation, one of them being an altered state of consciousness. And although I perceive this as resulting from *discussion* rather than *singing*, what Jordania’s discussion makes me think is that discussions may also have an evolutionary origin. I have not thought through just how this could have come about, thus this is a merely speculative suggestion at this point. But perhaps someone—such as Jordania—will be able to establish such a basis.

Today, we don’t face a threat from predators. Rather, the principal threat that we face is one of our own making—if but unintentionally. That threat—“global warming,” more recently referred to as [TAD](#)—is at least as serious a threat at present as the threat posed by predators was in the past, and like that much earlier threat, it is entirely in the realm of possibility that attaining an altered state of consciousness can help us in *addressing* that threat. I indicated in an earlier [essay](#) that I had—for reasons unknown—experienced an altered state of consciousness for an extended period in 1976, and therefore know from personal experience the value of such an experience.

Given predictions made by some “climate scientists” that TAD will cause a massive culling of the human population before it has run its course, it’s doubtful (but not inconceivable) that this culling can be prevented. Those in an altered state of consciousness caused by NeWF participation may, however, develop ideas which, when acted upon, will enable the “salvation”

of more humans than would occur otherwise. For that reason alone I am hopeful that NeWFs will be created, and draw numerous participants.

Endnotes

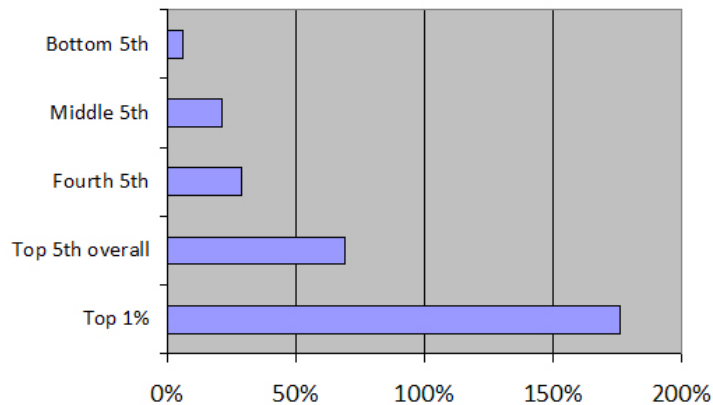
1. I learned about the importance of predation as an evolutionary factor from Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman, *Man the Hunted: Primates, Predators, and Human Evolution* (2005).
2. With group living being, on the one hand, virtually *imposed* on our ancestors as a survival necessity, but, on the other hand, females choosing to mate especially with those males having a proclivity for cooperative behavior. Because of this latter factor—i.e., “sexual selection”—and insofar as such a proclivity had a genetic basis, those born into a group would have a “natural” tendency to behave in a cooperative manner, which tendency would be re-enforced through simply being a *member* of the group and observing such behavior in others.
3. Given that the word “strategy” implies the use of conscious decision-making, and such was not necessarily involved, it might be better to state that those groups that happened to use music as a defensive measure had a better chance of having their members survive than those groups that did *not* use music this way.
4. However, with Socrates the discussions that he had with others always had *him* at the center. With the NeWF, in contrast, with each session there is a different “leader,” that person chosen at random.

[May 26, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/26/why-has-our-society-become-so-inegalitarian/>]

Why Our Society Has Become So Inegalitarian

Alton C. Thompson

There is no question that our society *has* become highly inegalitarian, and that the trend is for it to *continue* that way. For example, the [following chart](#) shows, for the United States, the



inflation-adjusted increase in after-tax household income between 1979 and 2005 for the top 1% and the four of the five quintiles. As the chart indicates, the higher a household's income, the more it has tended to gain in income over time—meaning that the distribution of income in our society has become ever more skewed over time.

The question that arises here is: *Why* has our society become increasingly more inegalitarian, with the trend being to continue in becoming even more inegalitarian in income terms?

The tacit assumption in even raising that question, of course, is that inequality is a *problem*. As that matter has been addressed at length in [The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger](#) by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009), there is no need for me to dwell on that matter here. Suffice it to say that the satisfaction of basic needs is made difficult if one has a low income, and psychological suffering is associated with being poor (and thereby made to feel inferior); and the wealthy are not only able to purchase anything they need and want, they find that their wealth also gives them *power* over others—an ability to control the lives of others. What the latter fact implies is that extreme inequality in our society enables the introduction—once again—of slavery in a new guise.

Several factors are often cited as explaining why our society has become ever more inegalitarian, a major one being growing disparity in the *sizes* of firms. If an economy consists primarily of small firms, none of those firms can have much of an impact on the *society*, and citizen voices can play the key role in the political realm—as happened in [Milwaukee](#) when it had Socialist mayors. However, as firms begin to grow at different rates, with the emergence of a few large firms in any given industry, the large firms gain power not only in the *economy*, but the *society*—and especially if certain laws and/or legal decisions (such as [Citizens United](#)) eliminate barriers that had existed previously.

Certain trends have been occurring in our society concomitant with the growth to dominance of just a few large firms, trends which have contributed to inequality:

- The outsourcing of jobs—large firms having a greater ability to do this than small firms. The motivation for outsourcing is to take advantage of low wage rates available in other countries; and as this is done, employees in the United States are terminated.
- Automation/computerization—enabling the production of a given quantity of some product, not only more rapidly, but with fewer employees; because a firm now has an “excess” of employees, the “excess” can be eliminated. (This trend also results in a reduction in skill level for those involved in production.)
- The destruction of unions—enabling firms to pay lower wages, and reduce the level of benefits offered to employees.

The above, then, are factors often cited as to why the middle class has been shrinking in this country, with those in poverty, or near poverty, increasing in numbers. And the growth in size of some firms has enabled those firms to gain monopoly power, so that those who own/manage them have been able to increase their wealth. Thus, the trends that have been occurring have resulting in increases at both ends of the income scale.

Does the above discussion go far enough, however, in explaining increasing inequality? Does it go to the *root(s)* of our problems? Does it identify what are *fundamentally* the causes(s) of inequality in this society? In other words, is it sufficiently *radical*? What I will suggest here is that the inequality of our society is rooted in a more fundamental problem, the fact that the *household* is the basic “people unit” in this society. Note that in the first paragraph above I used the term “household income,” and thereby tacitly suggested that the household should be taken as a “given”—as, that is, a unit that is simply taken for granted, without questioning its existence; for *questioning* its existence would be tantamount to *heresy* (from a religious standpoint) or *treason* (from a political perspective).

But in this essay I do precisely that. Not that I herein argue that we *abandon* that unit; rather, I argue, that having the household as our fundamental unit is a *problem*, and that we need to (a) *recognize* that fact, and then begin thinking about (b) how that problem can be *corrected*.

Why is having the household as our fundamental societal unit a problem? Individual households vary greatly in their characteristics, and it is this *variation* which is the source of problems:

- Households vary greatly in *income*, meaning that children’s opportunities—for the sort of education they receive, for the others with whom they will tend to interact, for travel opportunities, opportunities to engage with the culture, etc.—will also vary greatly. Thereby, their life chances will be affected. What’s ironic here is that often those from humble beginnings who become rich and famous tend to attribute their success to, e.g., “hard work.” For example, on Sunday (May 20, 2012) Henry (“Hank”) Aaron, the

baseball great who was with the Milwaukee Braves for many years (and was an idol of mine, I must confess!), delivered the commencement address at Marquette University, and [said](#): “For most of us, the realization of our dreams requires a strong, unyielding commitment, hard work and determination.” I’m sure that those factors help explain why *Aaron* became a great baseball player; the problem with the statement, however, is that it implies that *willing* (and the behaviors that result from willing) is the key to success, an implication that is highly misleading. (Perhaps the fact that he was delivering his remarks to college graduates makes his remarks less objectionable, however.)

- Households vary in the level of *education* of the parents, a factor which, independently of income, affects the opportunities that children will have.
- Parents vary in their *habits*, so that those children with parents having bad habits (e.g., smoking, gambling) may themselves tend to acquire those habits. (“Bad” habits are ones that may impact the well-being, adversely, of those who have them, along with their children.
- Parents vary in how [abusive](#) they are (physically and/or sexually) to their children. And, of course, child abuse is not necessarily limited to parents, as [this article](#) notes.
- Parents are not always careful in ensuring that their children develop good *eating* habits, a consequence being that [childhood obesity](#) has become a severe problem in our society.
- Etc. (See [Alfred Korzybski](#)!)

As a parent (1 son, 2 daughters) and grandparent (1 grandson, 3 granddaughters) I would like to think that our own children have had a good upbringing, and that our grandchildren are receiving a good upbringing: I have utmost confidence in my married son and his wife, and my married daughter and her husband, in their parenting. However, when I read about children being abused in various ways—and it seems like there are always stories of this in the news—it bothers me greatly. I can understand, to a degree, why parents abuse their children—e.g., they are operating under a great deal of stress. But the question is: How can the disparities in the environments that children have currently be reduced, if not eliminated?

In a number of my previous essays on this site I have noted the serious threat posed by what is commonly called “global warming”—and called by some [TAD](#)—and have noted that some climate scientists—such as Kevin Anderson (see [this essay](#) by Bill Henderson), an advisor to the British government on climate matters—have argued that this will severely cull the world’s population. (Anderson finds it conceivable, for example, that within the next 50 years 90% of the world’s population will be culled!)

I have argued in previous essays that it would be foolish for us to look to government for “salvation” from this possibility, and that the wise person will recognize that the best course to pursue would be that of joining with others in creating “building blocks” for a New Society. By

“building blocks” here I mean small communities, each of which would strive (initially, at least) to be as independent as possible from the Larger Society. This would not *guarantee* survival to old age, but would at least increase one’s *chances* that one would.

What I would now add is that such communities be designed to be “families of families,” as I put it in an [earlier essay](#). What this might mean in more *specific* terms I leave to those designing a given community. My point, however, is that just as a *family* provides its members with some degree of security (ideally, at any rate!), so would a *community*, as I conceive it. Not only would a community provide security to its residents; the children would be exposed, and on a regular basis, to adults in addition their parents, and to children other than their siblings/relatives. The *household unit* would be preserved in these communities, but the household unit itself would become a part of a larger unit, the community.

The fact that a given community would contain a number of adults means that a given parent would be able to observe how children other than her/his own were being parented, and if problems were detected, those problems could be brought to the attention of the offending parents. Thus, not only would children benefit from a wider exposure than is typically received by living in a household; parents would be under scrutiny by the other parents (and non-parent adult members), so that good parenting would (ideally) become the norm in the community. In addition, as new innovations and fads occur, members of a community—not being in a situation where there is pressure to “keep up with the Joneses”—would be able to evaluate those new developments rationally, rather than engaging mindlessly in invidious comparison (a concept made famous by [Thorstein Veblen](#)). (The [Amish](#) exemplify this principle.)

I would hope that such a community would not become oppressive for its residents, and efforts would need to be made to ensure that that would not occur. Variation would be expected in parenting styles within a community, and such variation should be encouraged rather than suppressed. The point is to work for some balance in freedom of thought and action on the one hand, and a degree of conformity on the other—the goal being to ensure the highest possible level of *well-being* for all members of the community. Use of the Structured Interaction Group (SIG—see Chapter 8 in my [eBook](#)) should help ensure that such balance is maintained.

As to the title that I have chosen for this essay: I am convinced that the fundamental reason why our society has become so inegalitarian is that the household is our fundamental societal unit. If the household were retained as a unit, but households grouped themselves into small communities, each striving to become a “family of families,” I believe that this would help equalize the households in a given community. With the society itself moving in that direction, the society itself should become ever more egalitarian.

Even if communities are carefully located from a TAD perspective, there will be no guarantee that those living in communities will be able to survive the ravages of TAD. But those engaging

in the building of the New Society thusly *can* ensure that those who *do* survive will have a better society to live in than what exists now. Given what exists now, *that* shouldn't be difficult!

[May 29, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/29/toward-a-practical-spirituality/>]

Toward a *Practical* Spirituality

Alton C. Thompson

While one is reading Kent Nerburn's [*Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads With An Indian Elder*](#) (1994)[1] (in which "Dan," a Lakota elder, is the primary "character") one encounters:

Humor:

"I don't remember anything about [Henry David] [Thoreau](#) [1817 – 1872] being a farmer. He mostly talked about how great it was to do nothing, then he went and ate dinner at his friend's house. He didn't want to farm and he's a hero. We don't want to farm and we're lazy." (p. 160)

Perceptiveness:

"Every time you talk about the frontier you are telling us that we don't matter." (p. 141)

[I was a History major in college and in my American History course was required to read "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" by [Frederick Jackson Turner](#) [1861 – 1932] and other works on the "Frontier thesis." That thesis was given prominence in part (I suspect) because Turner was born in Portage, Wisconsin, attended the University of Wisconsin, and later taught at that university. Little did I suspect at that time that Native Americans might have a rather different perspective on the "frontier"!]

Eloquence:

"We thought they [i.e., white settlers] were insane. The elders said to be careful because these people were dangerous. Most of us just laughed—at least this is what the elders told me when I was young. These people would ride across the land and put a flag up, then say that everything between where they started and where they put the flag belonged to them. That was like someone rowing a boat out into a lake and saying that all the water from where he started to where he turned around belonged to him. Or someone shooting an arrow into the sky and saying that all the sky up to where the arrow went belonged to him." (p. 42)

Statements that give one (as a white) a sense of shame:

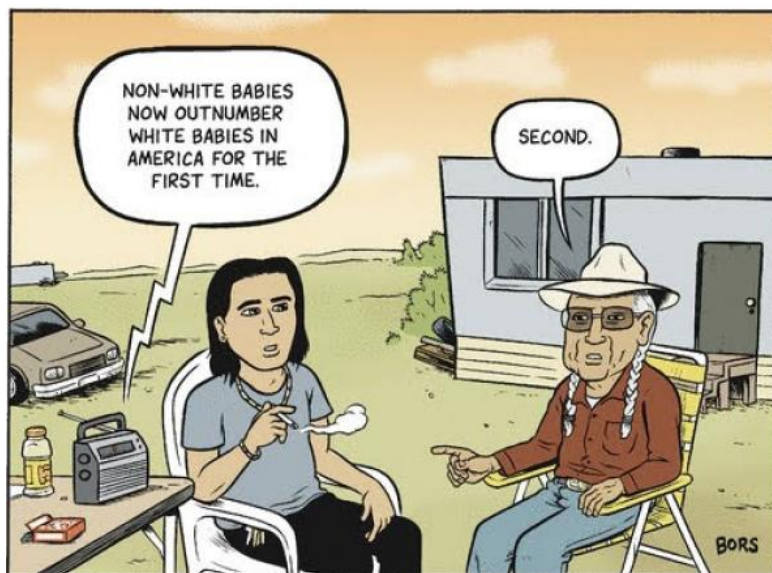
"You did something we did not think was possible. You killed us without even taking our lives. You killed us by turning our land into pieces of paper and bags of flour and blankets and telling us that was enough. You took the places where the spirits talked to us and you gave us bags of flour." (p. 44)

[This causes me to recognize that my ancestors, who settled in south-central Wisconsin in the early 1850s, were living on *stolen* land! And that *I* am too right now!]

One expects, when one reads a book by, or about, a Native American, that the emphasis will be on the *spirituality* associated with such people—how they spiritualize the [directions](#), how they perceive certain natural features (e.g., the [Black Hills](#), in South Dakota) as holy, how [animals](#) play a prominent role in their sacred stories, etc. And although spirituality underlies much of what “Dan” says in this book, he exhibits contempt for whites who fixate on Indian spirituality:

“White people that come around to work with Indians, most of them want to be Indians. They’re always wearing Indian jewelry and talking about the Great Spirit and are all full of bullshit.” (p. 13)

Given that to live in the United States is to live in a virtual spiritual desert (in which it is difficult to feel a sense of *wholeness*), it is not surprising that many in our society (whites in particular,



perhaps) are drawn to such works as [Black Elk Speaks](#) (1932).[2] What such people should recognize, however, is that the sort of spirituality that developed with a given Native American group—i.e., it tended to perceive “aliveness” in the various elements of nature (including the inanimate), and, “therefore,” to perceive *kinship* with those elements, such a perception affecting one’s *behavior* relative to those elements—*reflected* that

group’s way of life. That is, it was an *integral part* of the group’s way of life.

We moderns living in, e.g., the United States have a way of life very different from that of any Native American group of, say, 500 years ago; and *that* fact means that no Native American spirituality of 500 years ago will “fit” our current way of life.

Therefore, it would be *foolish* to try to restore an ancient Native American spirituality. Indeed, it is even foolish to engage in *nostalgia* regarding that past.

The sort of spirituality that developed with a given Native American group centuries ago did not arise out of a process of *careful planning*, of course. Rather, it developed because the group’s way of life made a particular spirituality’s development virtually *inevitable*; and once it developed, that spirituality helped perpetuate the group’s way of life. In a very real sense, then,

that spirituality was *practical*; put another way, it was not an *end in itself*, but served a *function* (if not a *purpose*—which suggests conscious choice).

That Native American spirituality was practical, was, then, an *incidental*—but important—aspect of it. The lesson to be learned from Native American spirituality, however, is that there is no reason to feel guilty about creating a spirituality that is (also) practical. Indeed, one can argue—and I will here!—that the spirituality developed by Jesus was a practical nature; and that the need today—which is different from what it was in Jesus’s day—is also for a practical spirituality.

The society that Jesus lived in had little in common with a Native American society of the time, and unlike the case of a Native American society, his spirituality rose out of *opposition* to the existing way of life rather than being one *supportive* of it. As a sensitive and intelligent person, he could *sense* that his society was not operating properly, and in learning about his own tradition was able to *articulate* what he could sense. He learned from his society’s Scripture that the fundamental law by which one should live was to love the neighbor—even the neighbor who was not Jewish—but observed that the Law being promulgated in his time was of a “blame the victim” variety rather than “love the victim.” That is, he observed that an *inverted*—and therefore *perverted*—version of the Law was being promulgated.

Somehow Jesus was able to attain an altered (“heightened”) state of consciousness, as Philip L. Davies has argued in his brilliant [*Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*](#) (1995), which state not only enabled him to heal (but *not*, as has been claimed, raise people from the dead!), but enabled him to perceive that if such a state were induced in *others*, they would not only be more receptive to learning the law of love, but be *enabled*—by simply *being* in that state—to *act*, on a regular basis, in accord with that law.

But *how* to induce that state in others? Here I would hypothesize(going beyond Davies) that Jesus “hit” on the idea of telling parables. Why would the telling of parables possibly be a causal agent here? Given that the exact meaning of a parable is rarely “perfectly clear,” the hearer of a parable will “naturally” want to discuss a given parable with one or more others who have heard the parable. The dynamics involved in such discussion can have a variety of (desirable) effects, one being to give at least some of those involved a “natural high”—can, i.e., induce in some of them an altered state of consciousness.

The gospels say nothing about this, of course, and provide no evidence that Jesus’s parable-telling induced a “high” in some of the hearers, especially those who involved themselves in discussions with others. However, I believe it highly plausible that this occurred. But insofar as it did, it evidently was not pervasive enough to result in societal transformation—i.e., the widespread acceptance of the love of neighbor command (to the exclusion of the victim principle), with consequent behavioral changes.

If the spirituality developed by Jesus had the intent of resulting in his fellows recognizing that God's basic law was to love the neighbor, even the non-Jewish neighbor, and to act on that law, it appears that he was a failure. One might argue that the reason that he was a failure was that his approach was *individualistic*, and should have been *societal*; that is, he should have attempted to bring about *structural/institutional* changes in his society. But, of course, the fact that Palestine was occupied (by the Romans) at that time made such an intent difficult to achieve—which Jesus may have realized, and therefore not even attempted.

The situation that Jesus faced centuries ago is still with us, but a new “wrinkle” has become apparent in recent years. Our use of fossil fuels, especially since about 1750 CE, has been adding “greenhouse” gases to the atmosphere, gases that “trap” some of the long-wave heat energy that emanates from earth. As more and more heat has been added to the atmosphere, several (direct) consequences have resulted, such as a trend in increase in the global mean temperature, an increase in the number of storms, an increase in the number of severe storms, and increased variability in atmospheric conditions at any given location (so that the very concept of “climate” is become less and less meaningful). In addition, of course, there have been, and will be, various *indirect* effects—virtually all of a negative nature.

Little effort has been engaged in to halt the “progress” of these atmospheric changes; in fact, it may very well be *too late* to halt it. The consequences of this are manifold, but the one of especial importance is the projection by some climate scientists that a severe culling of the world's population will occur, even within the next 50 years. If that occurs (and the chances are “excellent” that it will!), societies will begin to collapse, and chaos will be the order of the day.

Some people will likely survive the ravages of, and those induced by, these atmospheric changes, but those who will have the best chance for surviving will be those who *anticipate* those changes, make *plans* for adapting to them, and then *act* on those plans. As I have argued in various previous essays on this site, I believe it wisest for people to recognize that it would be foolish to look to government for “salvation,” and to join with others in creating small eco-communities that are as independent from the Larger Society as possible.

I would now add, however, that such efforts are likely to be most successful if *spiritualized*. That is, I recommend the creation of [NeWFs](#) (see p. 38 ff. in that essay) for planning purposes, and the retention of that institution in any communities that are created. The NeWF is, by its very nature, a *spiritual* institution, but is not an end in itself. That is, it is also *practical*; it can, on the one hand, be practical on *purpose*, but even if it is not, it will be practical in the sense of having real-world *effects* (such as those identified in the essay cited above), all of them of a positive nature, I would like to think.

Endnotes

1. A second edition was published in 2002. The title of the book comes from this statement (p. 169) by “Dan”: “I do not wish to be shut up in a corral. All agency Indians I have seen were worthless. They are neither red warriors nor white farmers. They are neither wolf nor dog.”
2. The “Premier Edition” was published in 2008.

[May 30, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/30/the-occupy-movement-as-a-reason-for-having-hope/>]

The Occupy Movement as a Reason for Having Hope

Alton C. Thompson

Here's a portion of a [recent posting](#) concerning President Barack Obama and his Republican opponent for the presidency, Willard ("Mitt") Romney:

In his comments, Romney was responding to three central criticisms advanced by the Obama campaign this week: that Romney's venture capital firm had exploited companies for the economic gain of executives, that Romney was advocating failed Bush-era economic policies and that Romney had equated productivity with personal income to suggest Americans weren't working hard enough.

The presumptive Republican nominee added that it "certainly sounds like" the president was attacking the free market system.

"There's no question but that he's attacking capitalism, in part, I think, because he doesn't understand how the free economy works. He's never had a job in the free economy; neither has Vice President Biden," Romney said.

As the posting indicates, Romney equates "free market system" and "capitalism," and asserts that the United States is now (and by implication, has always been) a "capitalist" country, so far as its economy is concerned.

One expects politicians to be glib, of course, but from *my* standpoint Romney's claims amount to so much "mush" (to avoid being vulgar here!), for two reasons:

- Rather than supplying us with a definition—a lecture on his conception—of "capitalism," he assumes that the meaning of the term is obvious to all.
- Not having supplied us with a definition of "capitalism," he feels no need to provide us with proof that the reality of our economy at present is such as to fit his definition of "capitalism"—reasonably well, if not perfectly. (For a recent commentary on "capitalism" in this country, as it has been developing, see [this](#).)

The fact that Republicans (as that party is *currently* constituted, at any rate) seem to be unanimous in taking the position that the size of government must be reduced, suggests that they believe that the economy should not be subject to any *interference* by government—and that that's what they mean by "capitalist."

But to claim that government should not “interfere” is not, of course, to claim that government should play no role in the economy—or society in general. For although the current Republicans are against “social” programs—i.e., programs that help “ordinary” people—they are all for those programs from which the rich and rich corporations benefit, such as public works projects (undertaken usually by private contracting firms, rather than government employees *per se*) and—especially!—the military. Indeed our Department of Defense would more accurately be named the Department of *Offense*—for it is offensive in both senses of the word: On the one hand, those doing contract work for that department make a “killing” monetarily and, on the other hand, the department’s personnel seems to have as their primary job the killing of innocent people—while *failing* to prevent the killing of people by, e.g., the Israelis.

I am always suspicious of people who use terms such as “capitalism,” “freedom,” “liberty,” “democracy,” because they never define these abstract words that they are using, and seem to use such words to mask their true intentions rather than to convey truthful information. They hope (if but unconsciously) that those hearing them speak or reading what they say will not “see through” them—and in many, if not most, cases that hope is realized. [Propaganda](#) can take many forms, and this is one of them, Thank you, [Edward Bernays](#) [1891 – 1995]—a nephew of [Sigmund Freud](#) [1856 – 1939]—for your wonderful contribution to the goals of truth and honesty! How prescient [George Orwell](#) [1903 1950] was, in writing in his classic [1984](#), that:

War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.

We seem to be perpetually at war; we are told that we live in a “free” society, but the facts are otherwise; and ignorance/propaganda seems to be the order of the day with our governmental officials and media—to say nothing of the commercials that bombard us as we view television or listen to the radio. (For commentary on Fox News see [this](#); for an excellent recent discussion of the subject, see [this](#).)

Each of the above is a problem from various perspectives, but from *my* perspective the basic problem that they present is that given that we are living in perilous times from an atmospheric change standpoint, this fact is being kept from the public. Indeed, our political leaders not only seem intent on *hiding* facts from the public, but making decisions that will *intensify* the problem rather than *address* it—[Obama’s recent decision](#) regarding the arctic being a case in point.

Those of concerned about humankind’s future (which is, of course, intertwined with that of numerous *other* species) must recognize the situation that currently exists so far as propaganda is concerned, and therefore realize that if any steps are to be taken to address the atmospheric change problem that faces us, it would be utterly insane to look to our political leaders for leadership. Rather, we must face the fact that private citizens must “take matters into their own hands.”

In a sense, this has already been occurring, in that millions of people have been engaged in the Occupy movement across the United States. Millions of people in our society—including many who have *not* participated in the Occupy movement—*sense* that much is amiss about our society, and I find this fact encouraging.

Those who *do* sense that something is wrong with our society seem, however, to be unable to *articulate* very well what they sense; and because of that fact, they are at a loss as to what to do about the ills of our society.

The reason that I find the fact that many have been participating in the Occupy movement encouraging is that it is such individuals who could, it would seem, be attracted to the sort of movement that is *especially needed* at present—a movement to build a New Society within the (rotten) shell of the Existing Order.

Participation can take two forms, and both are important. On the one hand, one can become an *active* participant; on the other hand, a *passive* participant—who helps *finance* those actively engaged in the movement.

“New Society” can, I suppose, be conceived in different ways, but I perceive the creation of a New Society as a process of creating “building blocks,” those “blocks” being small communities, each of which strives to be as independent as possible from the Larger Society. I conceive the initial communities in this movement containing *retirees* (because they have incomes independent of jobs), with the *diversity* of the movement (in age, etc., terms increasing over time as the movement progresses).

It should be kept in mind that our country has a rich communal history (the Shakers, Amana colonies, New Harmony, etc.—see, e.g., [this](#)), and that that history is still alive (see, e.g., [this](#)). One might, I suppose, make the argument that such communities are not “capitalistic”—and there might be merit in such an argument. My response to such an argument, however, is: “Who cares! How one *categorizes* them is of no importance. What *is* important is that circumstances are such currently that *something* needs to be done, and I happen to perceive the creation of such communities as *an*, if not *the*, answer to not only the problem of atmospheric change, but (quite possibly) our various other problems as well.”

Note that in arguing for such a program I am not asserting that in, say, 50 years our society would consist *just* of small communities. My hope is that our society would be *dominated* by such communities, but it does not follow from that fact that our citizens would be *only* living in such communities. Rather, I would expect that considerable diversity would exist in living arrangements in 50 years.

The only problem that I perceive is getting such a program underway. Someone must emerge to supply leadership to such a movement, and this has not occurred yet.

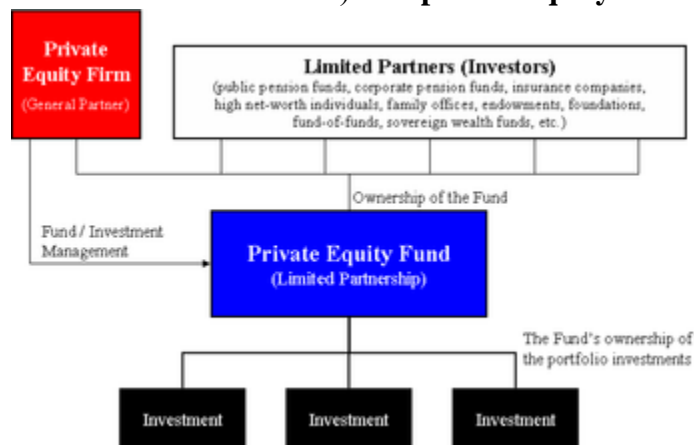
Of course, even if such a movement *does* get underway, there is no guarantee that those who become active participants in it will survive the ravages of atmospheric change. They will, true, have a better chance of survival than those who *ignore* “the handwriting on the wall,” but that’s all that one can say about their survival chances.

[May 31, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/05/31/pdf-private-equity-firms-bane-or-benefit/>]

Private Equity Firms: Bane or Benefit?

Alton C. Thompson

Here is a [definition](#) of “private equity firm” (with the figure below illustrating the relationships involved with such a firm): “A **private equity firm** is an investment manager that makes



investments in the [private equity](#) of operating companies through a variety of loosely affiliated investment strategies including [leveraged buyout](#), [venture capital](#), and [growth capital](#). Often described as a [financial sponsor](#), each firm will raise [funds](#) that will be invested in accordance with one or more specific investment strategies.” Such firms (which are coming to have an increasingly important [role](#) in the economy) have been in the news recently because candidate for the

presidency Willard (“Mitt”) [Romney](#) was formerly with Bain Capital—the [web site](#) of which describes the firm this way: “

Established in 1984, Bain Capital is one of the world's leading private investment firms managing approximately \$60 billion in assets under management. Our affiliated advisors make private equity, public equity, leveraged debt asset, venture capital, and absolute return investments across multiple sectors, industries, and asset classes. Since our inception, our competitive advantage has been grounded in a people-intensive, value-added investment approach that has enabled the firm to deliver industry-leading returns for our investors.

One might not guess from the above description that private equity firms would be the subject of controversy—but they are. Basically three questions have been asked regarding such firms—questions that are of a *normative* nature—i.e., questions regarding the *desirability* of such firms.

One of these questions has an *economy* focus (and, more specifically, an *Economics* focus):

Do the activities of such firms result in an efficient allocation of (scarce) resources?

A second question has a *societal* focus:

Does the presence of such firms in the economy serve the public’s interest, the common good?

A third question—raised specifically by President Barack Obama (referred to by some of as “O’Bomber,” for obvious reasons):

Does previous employment with such a firm provide one with the *experience* that one needs to be President of the United States? That is, is such experience *relevant* for the one who occupies the White House, and therefore charged to make certain sorts of decisions?

(Given that one might argue that private equity firms are “super firms” that play an important role in managing a country’s economy, so that they have a role that overlaps with that the Executive and Congressional branches of the national government, O’Bomber’s questioning of Romney’s experience with Bain might be regarded as somewhat off the mark. Insofar as private equity firms perform a *productive*, as opposed to *parasitic*, function in the economy, they do so in an unconventional—a “higher”?—manner.

What’s needed today is a [Thorstein Veblen](#) [1857 – 1929], or even a [John Kenneth Galbraith](#) [1908 – 2006], to comment on such firms. [Robert Reich](#) comes close to being another Galbraith, but not another Veblen.)

The *activities* of private equity firms are the result of *decisions* by those associated with such firms, but are constrained by *governmental regulations* which serve to prevent, or modify, some of those decisions. However, given that business lobbyists—of which there are many!—usually have a preference for a minimal amount of governmental “interference,” they are often able to shape regulations to serve the interests of their *clients* rather than the *public’s* interest.

The *excuse* that lobbyists may use in arguing for minimal governmental “interference” is that “the market,” in a [Market Economy](#), has the almost magical ability to allocate scarce resources in the most efficient way—but only if not interfered with by government. That argument is, however, based on the (tacitly-held) premise that all firms in the economy are (relative to the industry they are in) so *small* that none is able to have an effect on prices—whether charged by a firm, or paid to other firms (e.g., suppliers) or to labor—a premise utterly lacking in realism today.

In fact, it is precisely that lack of realism that explains why the national government (perhaps especially since the administration of [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) [1882 – 1945], famous for the [New Deal](#)) began to assume a greater role in our economy. As firms have grown in *size*, however, they—through their lobbyists—have been able to gain control over government so that on the one hand government does little “interfering” in the economy these days and, on the other hand, large firms use government for *their own* ends (the principal one being maximizing profit). For example, firms that produce for our (so-called) Defense Department make a “killing.”

One [commentator](#) has stated, specifically of Romney:

As the founder and CEO of the private-equity firm Bain Capital, Romney was a turnaround artist. In that role, the GOP frontrunner says, he restored failing firms to

health, usually with great success. He claims to have helped create thousands of new jobs and billions of dollars in new wealth.

Here is [another assessment](#) of Romney, almost as flattering:

Mitt Romney is the real thing. He was, by any measure, an astonishingly successful businessman, one who spent his career explaining how business might operate better, and who leveraged his own mind into a personal fortune worth as much as \$250 million. But much more significantly, Romney was also a business revolutionary. Our economy went through a remarkable shift during the eighties as [Wall Street](#) reclaimed control of American business and sought to remake it in its own image. Romney developed one of the tools that made this possible, pioneering the use of takeovers to change the way a business functioned, remaking it in the name of efficiency. “Whatever you think of his politics, you have to give him credit,” says Steven Kaplan, a professor of finance and entrepreneurship at the [University of Chicago](#). “He came up with a model that was very successful and very innovative and that now everybody uses.” The protests going on at Zuccotti Park now have raised the question of whether that transition was worth it. What emerged from that long decade of change was a system that is more productive, nimble, and efficient than the one it replaced; it is also less equal, less stable, and more brutal. These evolutions were not inevitable. They were the result, in part, of particular innovations developed by a few businessmen beginning a quarter century ago. Now one of them has a good chance of becoming president.

During the Republican [primary period](#), however:

Rick Perry called the Bain approach to business “indefensible,” “inherently wrong,” “vulture capitalism,” and Newt Gingrich called it “exploitation.” So, those who are worried that the critique of Romney’s role as a corporate raider is somehow a criticism of American capitalism or is somehow antibusiness should play back the Republican primary debate tapes.

Here are the fundamental questions about Romney and Bain: Did they help middle class, working families; did they create hundreds of thousands of jobs in America; was this American business at its best?

It appears, then, that if one’s interest is in the “health” of *firms* in the economy, one will perceive Mitt Romney—and private equity in general—as having made an important contribution to the American economy. If, though, one perceives the economy as merely a *means* to an end—that end being full employment, with everyone having a “decent” income—one will have a less positive view of private equity firms. Given that firms exist for the purpose of providing an income for their owners (and, in this age of stock ownership, their managers), it is reasonable to expect that they would not only have no loyalty to workers in this country (so that they will “offshore” jobs at “the drop of a hat”), but no loyalty to the country itself (evidenced by the establishment of accounts in “tax havens” by owners/managers)!! (See Robert Reich’s [web site](#), and his [“8 steps” video](#) in particular.)

(I should note that for [Adam Smith](#) [1723 – 1790], an economy was not an *end* in itself, but a *means* to an end. As, e.g., Jerry Z. [Muller](#) has stated regarding Smith ([Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society](#), 1993, p. 5), Smith suggested “that the proper role of social scientists is to identify the institutional means by which the mixed passions of human nature can be harnessed in the pursuit of a more decent society.” How few people in business today have such a perspective! Smith’s concept of “human nature” would not be accepted today (it has been thoroughly superseded as the result of archeological, anthropological, primatological, and experimental research), but his emphasis on the need for proper *institutions* is as relevant today as it was in his day. See also [this](#) and [this](#).)

Note that President O’Bomber, in [commenting](#) on Mitt Romney as a private equity specialist, has not criticized private equity firms *per se* (not surprising, given that for all his “likability,” he has little empathy for those at the bottom of the society) but, rather, has asserted that Romney’s relevant experience (for the presidency) is as Governor of Massachusetts (i.e., an executive position in a state government), *rather than* his experience with Bain Capital. The implication here is that Romney’s being a state’s governor did not have very favorable results, so that there is little, if any, expectation that he would be good president (as if O’Bomber has been!).

Certainly the kinds of decisions that one needs to make as President—e.g., deciding what innocents to kill tomorrow!—are of a different nature than those made as a businessman. But on the basis of O’Bomber’s presidency, there is little basis for choosing him over Romney. The primary difference, it would appear, is that if Romney were president, he would “push” for Congressman (*my* Congressman, in fact—damn!) [Paul Ryan’s](#) “Roadmap for America’s Future” (referred to some of us as his “Roadmap to Oblivion”!), which likely would mean misery for many—accompanied by a great deal of violence, one might anticipate.

The primary problem with discussions of private equity firms—a problem common, in fact, to *most* of our discussions in this society!—is that they only refer to the *short run*. And although one might expect that O’Bomber, given his position as President of this country, might have more of a long-run perspective than Romney—simply because of the office he holds—his actions provide one with little evidence of that (his recent [arctic drilling](#) decision being a prime example).

I find it difficult to live in a country where the preoccupations of most are with distractions and other trivialities, under the (tacit) assumption that tomorrow will be much like today. In a *literal* sense tomorrow likely *will* be much like today. What I’m referring to, however, is 30, or 40, or 50 years “down the road.” We continue to add “greenhouse” gases into the atmosphere, and seem determined to even step up the pace of doing so. I find myself living *physically* in the present, and it’s likely that most of the people who I know—at work, at church, my neighbors, etc.—have no idea what is going on *in my head*. For the *intellectual* world that I live in is of a

very different nature than my *physical* world. It's a wonder, I suppose, that I haven't gone insane! (Maybe I am, and just don't realize it!!)

Anyone who has read any of my previous essays knows that I believe that our society will collapse within a few decades, and that the wisest course for us today would be to put elections out of our minds and focus on what we can, and should, do in an attempt to survive the changes that will inevitably be occurring. My biggest frustration is that I have ideas as to what *I* would like to do, but lack the means (or is it “gumption”?) to act on those ideas. I will, however, continue to seek support for my ideas—for the simple reason that I *believe* in them.

Our society may seem to move through time like an unstoppable juggernaut. The fact of the matter, however, is that because of the high degree of interdependence that exists in our society—with, e.g., movements of goods and people occurring over long distances—our economy, and therefore society, is very *fragile*—very vulnerable to “shocks.” The “shock” that I foresee as most likely is that of “climate change;” and I foresee that “shock” *already* occurring—but occurring with much more of a vengeance as the years pass. (Note that *my* “shock doctrine” differs from that of [Naomi Klein](#).)

Adam Smith's Current Relevance

Alton C. Thompson

“[Mercantilism](#)” was a philosophy and practice that was dominant in Europe from beginning in the 16th century to the latter part of the 18th century. As a philosophy, it was “nationalistic” in that its object was the nation; it was also, however, a philosophy that pertained primarily to a nation’s *economy*. That (i.e., the latter) assertion must be qualified, though, in that a nation’s economy was not perceived, by Mercantilists, as an *end in itself* but, rather, as a *means* to certain ends. That is, the Mercantilist’s view was that a nation’s economy must be *controlled* in a manner that would serve the *nation’s* interest.

“Nation’s interest” was not interpreted in a manner that it might be today, for a tacit assumption of the Mercantilist philosophy was that societies *have* class systems, and “that’s just the way it is.” That is, Mercantilist philosophers proceeded in their cogitations tacitly assuming that a class system was “natural” and therefore not subject to examination—it was simply to be taken for granted.

As the above-cited article notes, Mercantilist policy included the following:

- Building a network of overseas colonies
- Forbidding colonies to trade with other nations
- Monopolizing markets with [staple ports](#);
- Promote accumulation of gold and silver
- Forbidding trade to be carried in foreign ships;
- Export subsidies;
- Maximizing the use of domestic resources;
- Restricting domestic consumption with [non-tariff barriers to trade](#).

The *purpose* to be served by those policies was to protect the mother country’s economy, and thereby ensure that that country’s elite would continue to retain its position in the society. It was in *that* manner that control over the economy was simply a means to an end, not an end in itself.

To understand [Adam Smith](#) [1723 – 1790], it is necessary to understand the *societal situation* that existed in his time—the fact that Mercantilism as a philosophy and practice was on a downward trend, but still a force *intellectually*. What British society needed in the late 1800s was a new philosophy, and Adam Smith provided it. His classic *The Wealth of Nations* [1776] had been preceded (1767) by [James Steuart](#)’s [1713 – 1780] *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*—the “first full-fledged economic treatise to appear anywhere.” Why, then, did Smith’s treatise gain renown while Stuart’s was consigned to oblivion? The short answer is

that Smith's treatise provided a better "fit" to the times than did Steuart's—which presented a "moderate mercantilism" viewpoint.

Although Adam Smith died over 200 years ago, his name is still invoked—perhaps more in the scholarly literature, however, than in common discourse. And when used in the latter sort of discourse, this is typically to provide support for one's views—much as "Christian Fundamentalists" use the Bible to support *their* views. That is, just as the Bible is used to support any number of views by those not interested in determining the basic "thrust" of the Bible, so do many today misuse Smith to support views that Smith himself might very well reject.

The danger in using, e.g., Adam Smith, to support one's views *today* is that if Smith were *alive* today, his views might be very different than those he presented in his [*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*](#) (1759) and [*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*](#) (1776). Smith isn't alive, of course, which fact makes very difficult any determination of his current relevance. The problem here is that the "raw material" that we have for making such a determination is the words that he wrote well over 200 years ago, which words were written in a certain *societal context*. Given that fact, those words require "translation," but how does one do this in a meaningful way? I'm not sure that there is a definitive answer to this question, but I have chosen to take my cue from Prof. [Jerry Z. Muller](#), who in his [*Adam Smith in His Time and Ours*](#) (1995) stated (p. 6) that Smith's current relevance is in "his mode of thought."

When I read this in the Introduction of my copy of Muller's book, I thought to myself: "I believe that Prof. Muller has identified the key to determining Smith's relevance for today. What I must do, then, is to send an email to him, asking if he has written specifically on Smith's 'mode of thought,' and if such a work or works is/are available online." I did then email him, and he responded thusly: "If you read on in the book [beyond the Introduction], I think that you'll see that much of the book is about this topic. However, a few years ago I published an article, drawing on materials from the book, that focuses on the topic. I've attached it for you." The article that he attached was "Thinking Like Adam Smith," published in *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance* (A Morgan Stanley Publication), Vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 90 – 95—an article that is not available (in its totality) on the internet. In this essay I use that article as my point of departure.

Muller discusses Smith's contribution under these headings (in addition to his first heading, "Smith's Intellectual Project"):

- Smith as Psychological Institutional
- Smith and the Visible Hand of Government
- "Externalities" and the Role of Regulation
- Psychological Institutionalism Beyond the Market

- Liberty and the Public Good
- Capitalism, Democracy, and the Prospects for a Decent Society

Muller begins his discussion of Smith's "timeliness" by stating (p. 91):

To explore the present timeliness of Adam Smith's work is to run the risk of anachronism, of wrenching his views out of their historical context. But to ignore its possible timeliness is to consign the study of past thought to antiquarianism. Those most inclined to make Smith into a patron saint often fail to think *like* Adam Smith because they are satisfied to like what Adam Smith thought (or more often, what they suppose him to have thought). Trying to find the timely in Smith by thinking as Smith thought is a less certain, but potentially more rewarding enterprise.

Thus, what Muller *claims* for his essay is to "think as Smith thought." Whether Muller *succeeds* in that project is a matter of opinion, of course; and I will be offering my opinions regarding this shortly. First, though, I need to convey some of the points that Muller makes in his article. In doing so I of necessity use my *subjective judgment* as to what Muller thinks is important in Smith's thought—important, that is, for *today*; in defense of that, I say only "Live with it!" Here, then, I present a list of what I regard as key statements made by Muller about Adam Smith:

- "Smith did not try to develop a science of economics free of moral judgments or ethical considerations. His policy recommendations were shot through with moral purposes—above all, to improve the material and moral welfare of the great mass of the population." (p. 91)
- Smith's "science of political economy was not a moralistic science: he tried to bring about improvement not by preaching, but by designing institutions that would strengthen incentives to act in socially beneficial ways." (p. 91)
- Smith insisted "on understanding the workings of existing institutions rather than attempting to design entirely new institutions on the basis of purported social scientific knowledge." (p. 92)
- "Smith predicted that the costs of government would increase as it undertook functions that were essential to the public welfare—not only defense, justice, education, and transportation, but other projects that were in the collective interest but unprofitable for individuals or corporations to undertake."
- Regarding the "public good" of education, Smith "advised government to set standards; provide the better part of the costs of education to those least able to afford it; and, whenever possible, to allow citizens to choose how they acquire the education necessary to meet those standards." (p. 92)

- Given the costs of negative “externalities” (a problem not recognized by Smith), a Smithian approach would be to “would be to recognize the reality of such disharmonies of private and social costs, and then attempt to use law to restructure the private costs in such a way that the *total* costs are borne by those who make and consume the commodities that create the negative byproducts.” (p. 92)
- If governmental regulation of private economic activity is judged to be necessary, in a “Smithian approach, the government sets the standards to be met and leaves it to the ingenuity of diverse actors in the market to provide the most economically efficient means of meeting them.” (p. 93)
- “Smith objected to excessive government intervention in economic and social life because laws are often enacted to serve private interests at the expense of the public interest, and because legislators do not have the information necessary to coordinate economic activity.” (p. 93)
- “Smith was far from believing that even well-functioning market institutions would produce a society of decent men and women. That task required other institutions that socialized the individual, taught him to control his passions, and fostered benevolence.” (p. 93)
- “Smith regarded the family as the first and most effective socializing institution, since it is there that children take their first steps toward self-command.” (p. 93)
- “Smith was concerned that processes within commercial society might tend to undermine those very qualities of character which are its greatest achievement and on which its success depends. In arguing against monopoly profits, he noted that wealth acquired too quickly and easily made “sober virtue” seem superfluous.” (p. 93)
- “Unlike thinkers from Plato to Rousseau, Smith did not disparage public amusements, nor did he demand that they promote virtue. He did, however, suggest that the law should prohibit “scandal or indecency” in an otherwise free market for public entertainment.” (p. 93)
- Smith “assumed that some degree of governmental prohibition of immoral action is necessary, but tried to minimize the need for such restraint by encouraging the cultivation of social control and individual conscience.” (p. 94)
- “Smith contended that the greatest happiness comes from acting in a manner we know to be virtuous, while the greatest misery comes from knowing we have violated moral law.” (p. 94)
- “Smith believed that one of the important roles of the intellectual was to draw moral distinctions between modes of behavior.” (p. 94) (So that one would neither refrain from making moral judgments nor “treat all moral codes as merely functions of systems of power”—so that one distorts the role that moral codes play, at least ostensibly.)

- “For reasons that remain to be fully analyzed, capitalism seems to be a necessary (though by no means sufficient) prerequisite for representative democracy.” (pp. 94 – 95)
- “One role for the intellectual, Smith suggested, was to serve as a member of what Hegel was to call “the universal class”—a professional bureaucracy devoted to the common good.” (p. 95)
- Smith “realized that a decent society would not come about through the market alone, nor were even the best-designed institutions adequate to the task. That task demanded that moralists like himself offer an intellectually coherent and emotionally compelling account of the standards of virtue and vice, and of the sources of shared respectability.” (p. 95)

Rather than commenting, point by point, on these statements—drawn from a discussion of what Muller calls Smith’s “mode of thought,” it being this “mode of thought” rather than the specific statements of Smith that have relevance today, per Muller—I will, rather, make some *general* comments of the above statements. On the one hand, a point by point commentary would become boring rapidly. On the other hand, however, I must confess that I don’t find Muller’s explication of Smith’s current relevance that—how should I put it?—relevant!

As to *my* views as to Smith’s current relevance, I would say the following:

- Smith did not fully recognize that societies are *systems*, meaning that the several parts that comprise a given society tend to *support* one another. In addition, at any given time one sector of the society tends to dominate the other sectors, and in recent centuries that sector has been the economy (with commerce, then industry, then finance being the dominant *subsector*). Thus, rather than, e.g., the education and religion sectors acting as *counterweights* to the economy sector, then tend to be *subservient*. (So much for his “universal class” concept!)
- Smith did not foresee an uneven growth of firms within a given industry, so that a few firms would come to dominate that industry.
- Because of that, he did not foresee that large firms (and rich people—who tend to be associated with those firms) would come to dominate *government* (through their hiring of armies of lobbyists).
- He failed to understand that the rich would segregate themselves residentially and socially from others (and that this pattern would be replicated by members of all other classes), so that people such as Mitt Romney would be simply incapable of *understanding* the lives of “lowers,” and thereby be incapable of even *thinking* about how such people could be helped.

- He was unable to recognize that the family was not necessarily the best fundamental unit for the Good Society. (See my [“Why Has Our Society Become So Inegalitarian?”](#)) This is not to say, of course, that the family should be abolished as an institution—a suggestion that Smith certainly would disagree with, as I would. It is to say, simply, that we should recognize that our ancestors lived in tribes—meaning that that is a type of social unit that is “natural” for us—and that although the traditional tribe no longer has relevance, the cooperative eco-community does.

As to *Muller’s* discussion, not only does he not recognize the above points. I am especially bothered by his lack of recognition of the threat posed to us humans at present by the accumulation of “greenhouse” gases in the atmosphere.

Muller’s article was published just a few years ago (2009), but Muller seems to be totally oblivious of the threat posed by “global warming” (or [Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization](#), TAD, as I prefer to term it). He makes reference to the problem of environmental pollution, but here is what he states about it (p. 93):

Take the example of environmental pollution. The moralistic response to pollution is that it is reprehensible and that the government should forbid it regardless of the costs. Smith would probably agree that pollution is reprehensible, but would try to control it in a way that would allow the market to minimize the costs of achieving this social goal. In one fairly recent application of this Smithian approach, the government has set permitted levels of air pollution, along with a system of “pollution permits” that can be bought and sold, allowing different firms to optimize their costs by spending more on either permits or pollution-control devices, or by shutting down the sources of pollution.

I take exception to Muller’s claim that Smith “would try to control it in a way that would allow the market to minimize the costs of achieving this social goal.” *Muller*, it seems to me, has a fixation on “the market” that I don’t think *Smith* would have—if he were living today, and therefore aware of the research findings and ideas of today’s climate scientists. I would like to think that a man of Smith’s intelligence would be able to understand that (1) government is now in the control of wealthy individuals and rich corporations, (2) those individuals (and the owners/managers of rich corporations) are—incomprehensible as it might seem!—deniers so far as TAD is concerned, (3) it’s likely that we either have passed, or will soon pass, the point of no return regarding TAD, so that (4) given that it would be foolish to look to government for “salvation,” we must act as individuals—either acting as individuals or (preferably) as members of self-selected groups—to engage in adaptive activities.

We need today an intellectual with the stature of Adam Smith to “tell it like it is” in a manner that would be compelling, and in a manner that would cause our leaders—in business and government in particular—to take notice. Perhaps the devastation that TAD will bring about

would then be lessened. It will not, however, be eliminated, for we have ignored Nature's signals, and Nature will now get its revenge.

[June 7, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/06/07/socrates-we-need-you/>]

Socrates, We Need You!

Alton C. Thompson

The forthcoming (June 5, 2012) election in Wisconsin (my home state)—a recall election pitting Governor Scott Walker against Milwaukee Mayor Thomas Barrett—features one candidate (the incumbent) who is gifted at lying, against a man who is (relatively—after all, he *is* a politician!) a truth-teller who is not particularly adept at telling the truth: He seems incapable of telling the *whole* truth, and do so forcefully. As a consequence, because of that fact—along with the fact that he is being outspent by a 25 to 1 margin!—he may lose in his bid to unseat the current governor. His supporters, however, have seemingly been more active in “getting out the vote” than those of his opponent, and for that reason their candidate may win—despite the massive propaganda campaign being mounted against him by the incumbent’s supporters/donors. Within a week, however, we shall know the results of the election.

Given that we residents of Wisconsin have been bombarded with commercials on television and radio, trying to convince us that we should vote for either Walker or Barrett, and that the “news” media have been lacking in objectivity in “reporting” on the race (is it any wonder that I refer to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* as the *Milwaukee Urinal*?!), we will feel a sense of relief after June 5—regardless of the election’s outcome. In the meantime, however, can you blame me for wishing that Socrates were alive and well, and living in Milwaukee? When the [Socialists](#) were in power here in Milwaukee (during much of the first half of the 20th century), we had a “squeaky clean” government here. And the same was true for our *state* when Robert M. (“Bob”) [LaFollette](#) was governor (1901 – 1906). (He was a U. S. Senator from 1906 until his death in 1925). Since 1960, however (when Socialist [Frank Zeidler](#)’s [1912 – 2006] term in office ended—as Mayor of Milwaukee—not only has Milwaukee’s politics deteriorated, but so has the state’s).

It should not be surprising that I have been thinking of [Socrates](#) [c 469 BCE – 399 BCE] recently, given that the current governor of Wisconsin resembles him only in being a male human being. I simply can’t imagine our governor saying (*sincerely*, that is!) things such as the following (all drawn from Plato’s [Apology](#)):

... I know that I have no wisdom, small or great.

... I am better off than he [a politician] is—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows. I neither know nor think that I know.

I found that the men most in repute were all but the most foolish; and that some inferior men were really wiser and better.

. . . a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything is doing right or wrong—acting the part of a good man or of a bad.

For wherever a man's place is, whether the place he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger; he should not think of death or of anything but of disgrace.

. . . whereas I know but little of the world below, I do not suppose that I know: but I do know that injustice and disobedience to a better, whether God or man, is evil and dishonorable, and I will never fear or avoid a possible good rather than a certain evil.

For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons and your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul.

For if you kill me you will not easily find another like me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by the God; and the state is like a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life.

I dare say that you may feel irritated at being suddenly awakened when you are caught napping . . .

But I have been always the same in my actions, public as well as private, and never have I yielded any base compliance to those who are slanderous termed my disciples or to any other.

What shall be done to the man who has never had the wit to be idle during his whole life; but has been careless of what many care about—wealth, and family interests, and military offices, and speaking in the assembly, and magistracies, and plots, and parties.

. . . the greatest good of man is daily to converse about [virtue](#), and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others, and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living

. . . I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live.

The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness; for than runs faster than death.

Me you have killed because you wanted to escape the accuser, and not to give an account of your lives.

. . . no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.

When my sons [he claimed to have three earlier] are grown up, I would ask you, O my friends, to punish them; and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue

One would like to think that in a modern society such as the United States the press would play the role of Socratic “gadfly.” But except for a few internet sites, this is hardly the case. Thus, the public—unknowingly, in most cases—is presented with truths that are trivial (e.g., facts about sports, the “stars”), partial truths, outright falsehoods—and is *not* presented important truths (see, e.g., [this](#)). Thus, on the one hand their minds are diverted from what is important or are prevented from learning important truths; and insofar as they *are* presented with information about the important, they are presented only with “surface” information (from which they may very well draw the wrong conclusions) or with “information” that borders on untruth.

We have, then, an ironic situation in our society—on the one hand scientists who strive to determine and publicize truths (subjecting their work to peer review in an effort to “get it right”), and on the other hand purveyors of “information”—whether “information” about products or services being offered for sale, or “information” being conveyed by a politician—that is deliberately designed to get people to *act* in a manner desired by the purveyor of the “information.” In this latter case, the attitude is “Truth be damned!” It’s fortunate that Socrates is not alive to be subjected to this sort of garbage! (If he *were* alive, you can bet that he would not keep quiet about it!)

How can one maintain one’s sanity if one lives in a society that is so schizophrenic about truth?! If one relies on the mass media for one’s information, the issue will likely never arise in one’s mind: One will be able to maintain one’s sanity, but at the expense of being terribly ill-formed and mal-informed. If, however, one is a seeker for truth, one can maintain one’s sanity only by retaining a firm—a Socratic—*commitment* to truth, and resolve to *maintain* that commitment.

Unfortunately, the commitment that *some* have to truth is terribly misguided—the case of [Elie Wiesel](#) being a notable example—although there are many others of a [Zionist](#) persuasion who could also be cited. For example, [Golda Meir](#) [1898 – 1978, Israeli Premiere 1969 - 1974]—who spent her early years in Milwaukee—is famous for [saying](#), in 1969, “There is no such thing as a Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist.”

I assume that Meir, in making this statement, honestly believed what she said—which raises the question: How is it *possible* that a person can accept, as true, such an utter falsehood? What is the *psychological explanation* for this phenomenon? I’m sure that not even Socrates would have been able to convince her otherwise—which likely would have caused him to commit suicide! (Just kidding!) Had that occurred near the end of his life, we would not have Plato’s magnificent

Apology; had it occurred earlier in his life, we likely would know *nothing* about this great man—and what a tragedy *that* would be!

The problem with believing that which is not true is that one may engage in actions that are *hurtful* of others and, on the other hand, *fail* to engage in actions that might be *helpful* to oneself and others. The best current example of the latter is that in not recognizing the threat posed by “global warming,” and even being a denier, one will fail to engage in activities that might “save” oneself and others.

Would that a Socrates would appear on the scene to “sound the alarm”! Were a Socrates to appear, the only way to shut him up would be to kill him—and he would demonstrate the same courage now as he showed centuries ago!

Our Changing Earth System

Alton C. Thompson

[James E. Hansen](#), who heads the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (i.e., NASA's) [Goddard Institute for Space Studies](#) in New York City, published, in 2009, a book entitled *Storms of My Grandchildren*. In that book he stated (among other things) that we immediately need to "reduce [atmospheric carbon dioxide](#) to at most 350 ppm in order to avoid disasters for coming generations". (At the time, the level was 385 ppm.) By "we" Hansen presumably meant "we Americans, under the leadership of our national government"—given that he is a government employee, and has testified before Congress (as early as 1988).

Almost immediately after Hansen published his book, [Bill McKibben](#) (an environmentalist who teaches at Middlebury College in Vermont), was inspired by Hansen's reference to 350 ppm, to start an organization with that name, along with <http://www.350.org/>. A few years earlier Bill had started a campaign—[Step it Up 2007](#)—that called for the U. S. Congress to take action on "global warming;" and a year before that Bill had organized a walk across Vermont to call attention to the importance of "climate change."

The questions that need to be asked of the efforts of the likes of Hansen (who has been arrested several times for his activism) and McKibben (who has also been [arrested](#)) are:

- Have these activist efforts been engaged in out of a sincere conviction that (a) "global warming" is occurring, (b) it poses a threat to humans, and "therefore" (c) our public leaders must be alerted to this threat so that they can then act to address the problem?
- Have these individuals engaged in these efforts in part out of a desire to gain publicity (or even notoriety)? That is, have their motives been less than "pure"?
- Regard less of their *motives*, have their efforts been *effective*?

In addressing these questions, let me begin by declaring that I have no doubt whatsoever that these gentlemen sincerely believe that "global warming" is a serious problem. But given that I *cannot* conclude that their efforts have been *effective* (for I perceive no signs that our leaders, here in the United States—in government and business—are taking this problem seriously), this leads me to interpret their activism as a result of one of the following two possibilities:

- They are publicity seekers who, therefore, have not given careful thought to the matter of how the problem might best be addressed.
- Although their motives are "pure," they are operating under the false assumption that if one knows *why* a problem exists, the *solution* to that problem will be obvious.

Being in a generous mood at present, I will reject the first possibility and opt for the second one—and argue that people like Hansen and McKibben are unwitting captives of the “lever model.”

The conceptual framework that forms the basis for this model is a *regression* equation. In a statistical analysis of some phenomenon there is a “Y” variable—i.e., that which one wants to “explain”—and a series of “X” variables—i.e., the factors which, together, one believes, “explain” variations in “Y.”

One gathers empirical data for one’s variables—Y and X—and then runs a program that determines the (multiple) *correlation coefficient* (which will vary from 0 to 1) for one’s data. One may also determine the relative “importance” (statistically) of each of the X variables, and then exclude from one’s analysis that X variable or those X variables that “contribute” but slightly to one’s results.

Assuming that one has obtained “good” results (i.e., a correlation coefficient close to 1.00), one can then create a regression equation—an equation that “predicts” the Y value, given a series of X values. The value of a regression equation is not merely “academic”—i.e., having relevance for *understanding* a phenomenon. It can have *policy* implications as well.

That is, let’s assume that the “Y” for our study is mean temperature (°C) for the earth for a given year, and that the key X variable found to be “significant” is the carbon dioxide (CO₂) level (in ppm—parts per million) in the atmosphere for the year. Given one’s “policy” orientation, one would conclude that if the Y value (mean temperature) is to be reduced, the CO₂ level must be reduced. So far so good—this is a perfectly reasonable conclusion.

The relevant question now becomes: *How* can the CO₂ level be reduced next year, the year after that, etc.? One’s correlation-regression analysis may seem to suggest that if the *output* of carbon dioxide next year (etc.) is reduced, the earth’s average temperature will be reduced somewhat. What such a conclusion ignores, however, that the carbon dioxide put into the atmosphere during a given year (as a result especially of the burning of fossil fuels) will *stay* in the atmosphere for a [long period of time](#), so that for that reason it’s *concentration* in the atmosphere tends to increase over time. And *that* means, in turn, that even if humans, over the entire earth, were to cease putting carbon dioxide (and other “greenhouse” gases, such as methane) into the atmosphere *tomorrow*, the *effects* of the presence of those gases would continue for decades—and more.

If, then, one way that one can be misled by one’s correlation-regression analysis is to fail to recognize the above important point, one can also be misled by one’s “policy” mindset—a sort of mindset that seems to be held by Hansen, McKibben, and many other environmentalists.

What I mean by a “policy mindset” is one that takes as a “given” the existing *institutional* structure. An important part of that institutional structure is the *political institutions* that exist—

at local, state, and national levels—and from a *legal* standpoint at least, it is *those* institutions that are charged with making decisions for the general public. As the problem of “global warming” is recognized as an *international* problem, it is not surprising that there have been international meetings (such as the one in [Kyoto](#), Japan) to address that problem. But given that there is no international organization that is the equivalent of a national government (the United Nations hardly qualifies), those concerned with “global warming”—such as Hansen and McKibben—have recognized this fact, and concentrated their efforts on trying to change *national* policies.

In doing so, however, they have made the tacit assumption that because governments have certain *legal* powers and responsibilities, it follows that one should look to governments to take those responsibilities seriously. Therefore, what one needs to do is lobby Congress and engage in protest marches—hoping that the latter will attract the media, that governmental decision-makers will become aware of the protests, be “educated” by them, and will then act in a manner desired by the lobbyists/protesters.

This is all “fine and dandy” in theory, but how *realistic* is it? As social scientists—and even “ordinary” people—have known for some time, despite the fact that all in this country supposedly have *rights*—*equal* rights at that—the fact of the matter is that “[elite rule](#)” has always been the [reality](#) in this country—a fact that the likes of Hansen and McKibben seem not to know: unbelievable, yes, but true!

Now if members of the elite were global warming “believers,” given their influence in this country, they would have ensured that the firms from which they were deriving sustenance would be “doing their damndest” to address this problem, and would also have forced governments to take steps necessary to address the problem. However, so few members of “our” elite have a concern with this issue that few firms are doing anything to address the problem, and the national government is following suit.

The “obvious” conclusion from these facts is that if one perceives “global warming” to be a problem, one will recognize that it would be foolish—even insane!—to look to government for remediation. One then needs to ask: If I can’t look to government, where, then, *should* I look?

My answer: Look to *yourself*! That is, recognize that “global warming” is likely to proceed, and in doing so is likely to *intensify*—to the point that our society (along with most, if not, all other societies) will be *collapsing* within a few decades. After all, if the culling occurs that is predicted by some scientists (e.g., British scientist [Kevin Anderson](#)), it is *inevitable* that societies will collapse!

If it’s reasonable to assume that our society will be collapsing “shortly,” it follows that one—if one has any sense!—will choose either to acquire some land away from urban areas (to be “safe”

from desperate people, searching for food once the society *does* collapse) and start [homesteading](#); or one will join with others to create a small [“intentional” community](#).

The point is that when our society starts to collapse, a point will be reached where one will not be able to go to the nearest supermarket to obtain one’s food; because such stores will increasingly not be able to *obtain* food, and won’t, therefore, be able to *sell* food—so that one will either need to go out searching for (and then stealing?) food, or allow oneself (and family members) to starve to death. Neither of those options is pleasant to contemplate! Thus, it would be wise for one to recognize this possibility of societal collapse, and anticipate it by following one of the two courses identified above.

A [recent article](#) points out that the 350 ppm level that James Hansen, in 2009, argued was what the world needs to achieve, rather than being closer to reality, is just the opposite—now being 395 ppm, with monitoring stations across the Arctic measuring more than 400 ppm this spring! However, “levels change with the seasons and will drop a bit in the summer, when plants suck up carbon dioxide, NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] scientists said.”

The article notes that prior to the Industrial Revolution, beginning about 1750, the level was about 275 ppm. The last time the level was as high as it is now, the article notes, was 800,000 years ago—or even more. Although a 400 ppm level is currently only present in the Arctic, and even in that area the level will decline somewhat during the summer, that level “will pass the 400 mark within a few years, scientists said.”

This is not good news! Thus, it is incumbent on those aware of “where we’re going” to not only recognize this, but realize that looking to government is not the answer, and that “grabbing the bull by the horns,” rather, is (in the manner indicated above).

In closing, let me note “parenthetically,” that when one uses the term “environment” or “environmentalist”—as I have in this essay—one may give the impression that one thinks of “environment” as something *external* to oneself—more generally, external to us humans. I used “earth system” in my title to suggest that I regard myself—and humans in general—as a *part* of that system. However, if one would like to eschew use of “environmentalist” in favor of a term that recognizes that one perceives earth as a *system*, what term should one use? “Earth systemist” is a possibility, I suppose, but that term is a rather awkward one. Thus, until someone creates better terminology—for “environment” and “environmentalist”—I will continue to use those terms.

Where Are We Headed?

Alton C. Thompson

By “we” I am referring here to the United States in particular—while recognizing, however, that what occurs in the United States impacts the rest of the world.

With that qualification out of the way, let me begin by noting that one can grow up in the United States without learning what an evil country this has been, virtually from the beginning. While in elementary and high school one learns that as white colonists pushed westward, they did so at the expense of Native American groups, but this phase of our history tends to be sugar-coated. We learn of Native Americans helping the colonists survive, colonists *purchasing* (rather than stealing!) land from Native Americans, colonists and Native Americans celebrating Thanksgiving together, etc. If we learned that colonists killed Native Americans, well, as the colonists were “advancing” westward—as they “had” to do—it was inevitable that they would be *attacked* by Native Americans—and they “had” then to defend themselves, of course.

In fact, while in college one learned (from the writings of [Frederick Jackson Turner](#)) that this westward expansion had a profound—and positive—impact on American values, in that we became a more egalitarian people who valued, and practiced, democratic procedures.

Of course, we also learned that slavery had been practiced by many of the landowners who lived in the South, and that even some of our Founding Fathers were slaveholders. We learned to excuse them for this, however, because it was common “at that time.” And besides, slaveholders didn’t necessarily mistreat their slaves—and didn’t William Grayson, in his “[The Hireling and the Slave](#)” (1856), argue—very reasonably—that Southern slaves often were better off than Northern factory workers?! Besides, we fought the Civil War to end that evil anyway, didn’t we?

In 1935 Gen. Smedley [Butler](#) published his [War is a Racket](#)—in which he criticized the military adventurism in which he had been a participant at the government’s direction, adventurism that had our country *interfering* in the affairs of other countries to benefit American corporations. “Interfere” is, of course too mild a word for this adventurism, because it resulted in a great deal of killing—of innocents. But how many American students learn about the adventurism discussed by Butler while they are in college? Very few, I suspect.

A more recent writer who has been exposing elements of our despicable past—and another writer likely given little attention in our colleges and universities, I suspect—is [William Blum](#). Blum is the author of [Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower](#) (2000) and [Killing Hope: U.S. Military and C.I.A. Interventions since World War II](#) (2003—with a 2008 edition

now available). Some of the chapters of the latter book can be downloaded from Bill's web site, www.killinghope.org. Also, Bill produces a free monthly newsletter—one needs only to ask to be placed on his emailing list.

In addition to William Blum, another notable writer who has written honestly about our past—again primarily from an “interventionist” (in other countries) point of view—is the late [Chalmers Johnson](#) [1931 – 2010], who had been a consultant for the CIA between 1967 and 1973. Among the books that Johnson wrote were [Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire](#) (2004, second edition); [The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic](#) (2004); [Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic](#) (2008); and [Dismantling the Empire: America's Last Best Hope](#) (2011).

In the final chapter of *Nemesis*, Johnson made this [comment](#):

“The Sorrows of Empire was written during the American preparations for and launching of the invasions and occupations of [Afghanistan](#) and [Iraq](#). I began to study our continuous military buildup since World War II and the 737 military bases we currently maintain in other people's countries. This empire of bases is the concrete manifestation of our global [hegemony](#), and many of the blowback-inducing wars we have conducted had as their true purpose the sustaining and expanding of this network. We do not think of these overseas deployments as a form of empire; in fact, most Americans do not give them any thought at all until something truly shocking, such as the treatment of prisoners at [Guantanamo Bay](#), brings them to our attention. But the people living next door to these bases and dealing with the swaggering soldiers who brawl and sometimes rape their women certainly think of them as imperial enclaves, just as the people of ancient [Iberia](#) or nineteenth-century [India](#) knew that they were victims of foreign colonization.”

Those of us aware of our country's evil past, and disgusted with George W. Bush for starting an unprovoked war against Iraq (done because [Israel wanted](#) us to?) voted for Barack Obama because we believed that he might lead our country in a different direction—toward decency. Little did we suspect (although perhaps we *should* have known, if we had examined Obama more closely) that he would continue, and even extend, the policies of his predecessor.

Today (March 31, 2012—my late dad's birthday, I just realized!) I learned that while Obama was attending high school in Hawaii, he was [known](#) by his schoolmates (fellow basketball players in particular, evidently) as “Barry O'Bomber”! Should we be surprised, then, that Obama has become “Bush junior”? (A rhetorical question—as I'm sure you realize!)

As Ralph Nader notes in the article just cited,

The bombings by Mr. Obama, as secret prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner, trample proper constitutional authority, separation of powers, and checks and balances and constitute repeated impeachable offenses. That is, if a pathetic Congress ever decided to uphold its constitutional responsibility, including and beyond Article I, section 8's war-declaring powers.

[Nader](#)—a lawyer by training—faults members of the U. S. Congress—and members of his own profession—for failing to criticize Obama, and act as a check on his vile actions.

[Ray McGovern](#) has also, though, commented recently on Obama's illegal actions, and I find his comments even more impressive—because McGovern is passionate about expressing his views regarding Obama, and presents a broader perspective than does Nader.

The basis for McGovern's [article](#) is an article that appeared in the *New York Times* on May 29, 2012, by Jo Becker and Scott Shane, entitled "Secret 'Kill List' Proves a Test of Obama's Principles and Will." McGovern, in summarizing the article, notes that both Obama and his predecessor have been playing "fast and loose" with the law, with the former receiving legal advice—and justification—for doing what he has been doing from his Attorney General, Eric Holder, and State Department lawyer Harold Koh. On the basis of that advice, Obama has been directing his counterterrorist (a misnomer!!) advisor John Brennan to "nominate" (a prostitution of the English language!) people to be killed, "without charge or trial, including American citizens."

Whereas Nader had commented on this latest development from a *Constitutional* perspective, McGovern uses a *religious* one—not surprising given that he now works for *Tell the Word*, the publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC.

McGovern notes that Brennan was presented with a Doctor of Humane Letters, *Honoris Causa*, degree by Fordham University—a Jesuit university—on May 19, and was asked to give the commencement address there as well. McGovern went on to note that there is a bumper sticker that reads:

When Jesus told us to love our enemies, I think he probably meant not to kill them.

And went on to note, pointedly:

Not one of the thousand cars driving onto the Bronx campus of Fordham University for commencement on May 19 was sporting that bumper sticker, nor was there any attention given to the general concept at commencement.

I don't know if McGovern actually observed all of the cars entering the Fordham parking lot that day—and counted them!—but his point is that here is a *religious* institution—an institution that assumedly accepts the teaching that one should love the neighbor—that was not *forced* to invite

a person of Brennan's ilk to its campus—for an honor, and to give an address, at that—but did so anyway. Are we now living in an Orwellian world where hate is love, or are members of Fordham's administration simply blind? Let us hope that it is the latter rather than the former! Fortunately, some of Fordham's students had better vision and they “orchestrated some [imaginative protests](#).”

McGovern noted that one of those in attendance was Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, and head of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (and, I would add, an Archbishop here in [Milwaukee](#) before moving on to New York). McGovern muses:

I wonder if it occurred to Dolan that from these same steps an honorary degree was conferred in 1936 on Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli, author of the Vatican's Concordat with Nazi Germany. Later, as Pope Pius XII, Pacelli could not find his voice to speak out forcefully against the wars and other abuses of the Third Reich, including genocide against the Jews.

(I should note that Catholic theologian Daniel C. Maguire, who teaches at Marquette University here in Milwaukee, was a vocal critic of Dolan while Dolan was here in Milwaukee, and has continued to criticize him; see, e.g., [this](#). Dan has a web site that deals with various ethical issues, <http://www.religiousconsultation.org/>).

McGovern concludes his article on a chilling note. He states that he had recently visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in West Jerusalem, and several years ago had visited the Dachau concentration—“death” would be a more apt term!—camp. Referring specifically to Dachau he said:

There were parallels that stood stark naked for any thinking American to see: parallels between Hitler's success in grabbing dictatorial power in Germany—largely because of a supine Parliament, an acquiescent Church, a careerist Army leadership, and a fearful populace—and the situation we Americans face today with “kill lists,” unconstitutional “laws,” and Gestapo-style police armed to the teeth.

He went on to say:

I noticed that one of the English-speaking guides [at Dachau] pointed to the generals and jurists but avoided mentioning the bishops, so I insisted he make full disclosure. (It occurred to me that Hitler might have been stymied, had the Catholic and Lutheran bishops been able to find their voice.)

And (quoting “unbeliever” Albert Camus):

“What I know—and what sometimes creates a deep longing in me—is that if Christians made up their mind to it, millions of voices—millions, I say—throughout the world would be added to the appeal of a handful of isolated individuals, who, without any sort of affiliation, today intercede almost everywhere and ceaselessly for children and other people.” (Excerpted from [Resistance, Rebellion, and Death: Essays](#))

The question that McGovern’s article leaves us with us Americans, then, is: Given that the dominant religion in this country is (still) Christianity, a religion supposedly based on the teachings of Jesus, its putative founder, and that Jesus taught—as the bumper sticker cited earlier suggested—that Jesus did not condone killing, why have not the religious leaders in this country (including *non*-Christian ones—who, after all, share with Christians a similar ethic) raised their voices in protest against the decisions and actions of the current president, to say nothing of his predecessors? Why is it that an “unbeliever” such as Albert Camus can be so ethically *astute* while religious leaders remain so *obtuse*?

It’s enough to make one cry! After all, if Jesus could [weep](#) (v. 35) in response to the death of Lazarus—one person—why is it so hard for us to weep at the deaths of numerous innocents at the hands of our leaders?!

[June 12, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/06/12/thank-you-deniers/>]

Thank You, Deniers!

Alton C. Thompson

Author/journalist Richard Schiffman recently stated (in “[Who Is Behind the Conspiracy Against Climate Change Science?](#)”

We are facing a potential holocaust for life on earth, which could destroy entire ecosystems, turn productive regions into dust bowls, multiply catastrophic weather events, wipe out a large proportion of the planet's species and cost us more in dollars (not to mention lives) than all the wars in history combined.

You would think that even conservatives would appreciate the huge economic threat this poses. When you get right down to it, acting to minimize the effects of climate change is a quintessentially conservative cause; it is about conserving the earth and our way of life for future generations. So, if the real conservatives are not behind the war against climate science, who is?

It's ironic, isn't it! Those who think of themselves as “conservatives” in our society have the expectation that their position in the society will remain stable over time. But how irrational such a viewpoint is!

By ignoring the reality of what is commonly called “global warming,” they seemingly are operating under the assumption, “If I *pretend* that it is not occurring, then it *is* not occurring—and therefore can do me no harm.” Can't they get it through their heads that as global warming proceeds, societies—including ours, of course—will sustain more and more “shocks,” with the likely eventual result (within 50 years?) that societies will begin collapsing. Where will they be *then*, “position-wise”? Given that they have been non-contributing members of the society who have been parasites rather than productive members of the society, as the “host” disappears—so that their support vanishes—they will be left “high and dry,” and likely won't be able to survive.

But should we be *critical* of “conservatives” for being deniers, or is there reason for being *happy* that they are such fools? I, for one, am delighted that the “conservatives” in our midst tend not only to *be* deniers, but *peddlers* of denial (at least in the sense of supporting a denial mentality). (Schiffman refers to the Heartland Institute, American Petroleum Institute, American Enterprise Institute, Charles and David Koch, ExxonMobil, and the George C. Marshall Institute as among the organizations/individuals funding those who promote denial. He also cites [Merchants of Doubt](#) (2011), by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. M. Conway as a work that expands on the subject.)

“What? You are *glad* that denial is being peddled, and by ‘conservatives’? Have you no concern for the future of *our* species—to say nothing of *other* species? Adolph Hitler was a monster, to be sure, but you sound like even *more* of a monster; for while Hitler was a person who was consumed by irrational hate, you seem to be *indifferent* to the human suffering that will likely be caused by “global warming.”

I’ll admit that my position *seems* to be a heartless one, but let me explain myself.

My starting point is this statement by [Bill Henderson](#) (an environmental activist who lives in British Columbia, Canada):

There is a [growing science literature](#) on the implications of a 4 C rise in global mean temperature; for example Kevin Anderson predicts that a 4C temp rise expected by as soon as 2060 will lead to the premature death of 9 out of 10 people then alive globally.

(The link in this quotation is to the web site of the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society. This site has, in turn, links to a number of scientific papers concerned with the subject of climate change. I assume that Bill derived the “9 out of 10 people” assertion from one of those papers, but he did not specify which one. By the way, [Kevin Anderson](#) is an advisor to the British government on climate matters.)

From what I have stated so far, I draw three conclusions of note:

- Within 50 years it’s likely that our society (along with most other societies, of course) will collapse.
- “Conservatives” will be doing nothing to stop that from occurring and will, in fact, do what they can to hasten the process (if but inadvertently).
- At some point “conservatives” will “wake up” to the fact that they have been irrationally undermining their position in society—and even putting themselves in danger of dying prematurely from one or more causes related to “global warming”—but it will then be too late for them to change their minds and their ways.

If the above looks at the future from the standpoint of what it is likely to mean for “conservatives,” the important point to keep in mind here is that *their* standpoint is not the *only* one: There is also the “rest of us.”

Those in *that* category are of two types:

- Those who have accepted the propaganda of the denial supporters.
- Those who have “denied denial.”

Those in the first of these two categories likely vary in the *strength* of their denial—from those who are “true believers” who have such a psychological investment in denial that they will only be persuaded otherwise when it becomes “perfectly clear” that the denial position is simply without merit; to those who believe in denial because they believe that such a belief is warranted, and—lacking a psychological investment in that belief—are persuadable at a point in time *before* it’s impossible to deny.

We have, then, two groups of people, those who either currently believe that “global warming” is occurring, and can be persuaded fairly easily that it is. Of these two groups it is the first ones who are especially important, for if they are “believers” who can also anticipate the collapse of our society, they should also be able to realize that we are living in a time that is unusual in human history in being a time that is paradoxical in being:

- A time when unmitigated disaster is in our future.
- A time when—*because of that very fact*—there is a sort of *opportunity* that has never faced humans before. An opportunity that is present *precisely because* of the obtuseness of our society’s “conservatives”—in their not recognizing “global warming” as a threat to *them*, causing them to be deniers, and supporters of denial.

What is the *opportunity* to which I am referring? The opportunity to create a *New Society* while the Existing One is crumbling—an effort *facilitated* by the crumbling of the Existing Order. Over the centuries there have been [numerous proposals](#)—often in the form of “utopian novels”—regarding alternatives to the Existing Order, but such proposals have mostly simply remained as proposals. True, there have been various [attempts](#) to *realize* such proposals (some by religious groups—the Shakers, Amana colonies, Zoar; some by secular groups—e.g., Robert Owens’s New Harmony), but most of those attempts failed after a few years (the [Shakers](#) having the greatest longevity).

Likely those “experiments” failed for a variety of reasons, but I suspect that the main one was that the Larger Society was, at the time, more *attractive* than was the typical “utopian community.” Thus, when people became even slightly dissatisfied with community life, they abandoned the community they were living in for life in the Larger Society.

Today, however, the situation is different—or, more accurately, will be *becoming* different. First, as our society begins to disintegrate, life in, e.g., a small cooperative eco-community will become relatively more attractive—and may attract both those who are not deniers and those (at a slightly later point) who are mild deniers.

Second, those historic communities have received the attention of many scholars, so that the pitfalls that those communities encountered can, potentially, be avoided. In addition, ideas have been developing as to what people need for well-being, how best to make decisions, etc. (see my [eBook](#) for ideas), and such information can prove of great value in designing the New Society.

What remains is for those who are *not* deniers to recognize the wonderful opportunity that lies before them, and then become the vanguard for a movement to create the New Society. They need to recognize that they will be able to “save” but a small percent of the American population (with those in other countries also so limited); but they also need to recognize that it is better to save just a few than no one. If there is *no* such movement, some are likely to survive—but at only a rather “primitive” level. *That’s* why it’s important for such a vanguard to form (and soon!), and then act.

Solving the Inequality Problem

Alton C. Thompson

Noted economist Joseph E. Stiglitz (winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2001) has recently [summarized](#) his ideas on the “myth of opportunity” and the “price of inequality.” (He has developed his ideas more fully in his just-published [*The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*](#), 2012.)

Stiglitz notes that there is “less equality of opportunity in the United States today than there is in Europe—or, indeed, in any advanced industrial country for which there is data.” And *because* of that lack of equality of opportunity, the United States now “has the highest level of inequality of any of the top advanced countries—and its gap with the rest has been widening.” That the United States is a “land of opportunity” has always, of course, been a myth; but this myth has become even more of a myth in recent years, Stiglitz notes.

This growing inequality has both *causes* and *consequences*, and Stiglitz touches on both in his article. As to *causes*, Stiglitz mentions the following:

- Some have obtained their exceptional wealth by exercising monopoly power.
- Some CEOs have “taken advantage of deficiencies in corporate governance to extract for themselves an excessive share of corporate earnings.”
- Some have used political connections “to benefit from government munificence—either excessively high prices for what the government buys (drugs), or excessively low prices for what the government sells (mineral rights).”

In terms of this country’s *mythology*, one is rewarded, financially, in proportion to one’s merit—i.e., one’s *contribution* to the economy’s “health”: The more important one’s contribution, the more one will—and *should*—be rewarded. Thus, if one has a low income, this is because one’s contribution is minimal. (That one might receive a low income because one is unemployed for no fault of one’s own, is one of the factors ignored by our mythology!)

In terms of the *realities* of how compensation is apportioned, however, one’s income has little bearing on one’s contribution. In fact, in recent years some of the wealthiest of our citizens have, through their reckless (but legal) behavior, done great damage to the economy—resulting in great financial hardship for the “99%.” As Stiglitz puts it, “America has become a country not ‘with justice for all,’ but rather with favoritism for the rich and justice for those who can afford it—so evident in the foreclosure crisis, in which the big banks believed that they were too big not only to fail, but also to be held accountable.”

The inequality that arises from the decline in equality of opportunity has various *consequences*, and Stiglitz lists several. Unsurprisingly, the consequences that he lists are basically of an *economic* nature:

- A lower rate of economic growth.
- Less efficiency in production.
- The country's "most valuable asset—its people—is not being fully used. Many at the bottom, or even in the middle, are not living up to their potential, because the rich, needing few public services and worried that a strong government might redistribute income, use their political influence to cut taxes and curtail government spending."
- As a consequence of this curtailing of government spending, there is "underinvestment in infrastructure, education, and technology, [thereby] impeding the engines of growth."
- International organizations (e.g., the International Monetary Fund) have concluded that "inequality leads to economic instability."
- "But, most importantly, America's inequality is undermining its values and identity."

Is our situation hopeless, then? Stiglitz makes two comments relative to this:

- Growing "inequality is not inevitable. There are market economies that are doing better, both in terms of GDP growth and rising living standards for most citizens. Some are even reducing inequalities."
- "America can no longer regard itself as the land of opportunity that it once was. But it does not have to be this way: it is not too late for the American dream to be restored."

For a more *comprehensive* discussion of why societal inequality is objectionable, one will need to go to, e.g., [*The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*](#) (2009), by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. My starting point here is the assumption that it is more desirable to have a society that is relatively egalitarian than one that is relatively *inegalitarian*; and the question that I wish to address here is: *How* does one make our society more egalitarian?

Stiglitz notes that some "market economies" are doing better than ours in "rising living standards for most citizens," with some of them "even reducing inequalities." He thereby implies that because progress in the direction of greater equality has been achieved in *other* societies (ones with "market economies"), it is also possible in *ours*. After all (he tacitly assumes), all societies with "market economies" have much in common *besides* their economies, so that what's possible in one society with a "market economy" is also possible in another society with such an economy.

What this (tacit) assumption ignores, of course, is, first, that “market economy” is not a *homogeneous* category: Societies with “market economies” can vary considerably in the *particulars* of their economies.

Second, the *economy* of a society is just one part of the society. The fact that societies are *systems* implies, of course, that the *other* parts of a society will *reflect*, and be supportive of, the society’s economy. However, societies vary in their histories, the nature of their cultures, etc.; and the relevance of those facts is that what’s possible in *one* society may not be possible (or as easily accomplished) in *another* society. The “moral” here is that just because [Norway and Sweden](#), e.g., (the former in particular) have gained a measure of control over the “1%” in their countries, one cannot conclude that such control would be easily accomplished in the United States.

Stiglitz claims that “it is not too late for the American dream to be restored.” But, first, *how* can it be restored? Stiglitz offers us no guidance (in this article, at least) as to how it might be restored.

What I would suggest is that such restoration *is* possible (or at least conceivable), but only if we adopt a time frame different from that implicit in Stiglitz’s discussion. For Stiglitz the “future” is seemingly “the next few years.” Surely Stiglitz, as an economist, is aware of the statement by John Maynard Keynes [1883 – 1946]: “In the long run we are all dead”—a statement that takes on a new meaning in this age of “global warming.” Evidently Stiglitz is not, though, aware of the argument, put forth by British scientist [Kevin Anderson](#), that it is entirely conceivable that within the next 50 years “global warming” will claim the lives of [perhaps 90%](#) of the world’s population.

It would seem that there is nothing that we humans can do to prevent a severe culling of the world’s population; it does not follow from that possibility, however, that there is *nothing* that we can do. It’s not likely that we will be able to reduce the percent loss to much less than 90%, but surely we have an obligation to our descendants (if we are to have any!) to do what we can to lower that percent value. As I have commented on this matter in a number of previous essays on this site, I will summarize my thinking briefly on the matter here by saying:

- It would be foolish to look to our political leaders for “salvation.”
- Given this, we must, acting as individuals (acting either as individuals or jointly with a few others) begin—and ASAP!—to engage in *adaptive* activities. As Anderson put it (in the article cited above), “a few people with the right sort of resources may put themselves in the right parts of the world and survive.” I have recommended in various of my essays on this site that people do so by creating small, cooperative eco-communities with like-

minded others; but if one believes that one has a *better* idea, one should by all means pursue it instead.

Although one must have as one's primary consideration doing what is necessary (seemingly) to survive (and it's always possible that the choices that one makes will not allow that), one should keep in mind that one has an opportunity—*unique* opportunity, in fact—to create the rudiments of an egalitarian society while seeking to survive. Given that one *has* that opportunity, one should take advantage of it! (There are, of course, many goals *in addition to* equality that one should consider, as I note in my [eBook](#), but equality is certainly one of the primary ones.)

Learning From Early Christianity

Alton C. Thompson

What can we learn from early Christianity [1] that might have relevance for today? Note that my emphasis here is on *relevance*, so that what I am asserting, in effect, is that not all factual truths that have been discovered about early Christianity necessarily have relevance for today: The antiquarian—a person who seeks knowledge as *an end in itself*—may be interested in *all* conceivable facts about early Christianity, and regard all of those facts as of equal importance. I, however, am *not* an antiquarian, and am interested, rather, in learning *only* those facts—or apparent facts—regarding early Christianity that have relevance for today—with *myself* being, of course, the person who decides what is, and is not, relevant. (I should add that my concept of “today” is a slice of time that extends from now to several decades into the future.)

One can, of course, question the assumption that there *is* firm knowledge regarding Jesus and early Christianity. And I will be the first to admit that it’s doubtful that much firm knowledge *does* exist: It seems that every book that one reads about Jesus or early Christianity presents one with a *different* set of “facts,” so that it is virtually impossible—even if one is a specialist—to arrive at a “true” set of facts regarding either subject. Given this diversity, it would seem that one’s only choice is to use existing sources to arrive at a “picture” of Jesus and early Christianity that seems believable to *oneself*—and that’s exactly what I’ve done.

My “picture” of Jesus and early Christianity has been developed (no pun intended, of course) from (a) my early contact with a “[Pentecostal](#)” religious group, (b) an extended “natural high” (i.e., [altered state of consciousness](#)) that I experienced (for reasons unknown) during the summer of 1976, and (c) my reading in the professional (and non-professional) literature regarding Christianity and religion in general. The single book which has, however, most impacted my thinking about Jesus and early Christianity—in large part, I suspect, because of the above-mentioned *experiences*—is Stevan L. Davies, [Jesus the Healer](#): *Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity* (1995).

What’s different about that book is that its author recognizes that phenomena such as “possession” and “trance” are, and have been, widespread—associated with religions cross-culturally, as well as historically. Religions as we know them in the *West* today (with certain exceptions) take as a “given” a *normal* state of consciousness—for the simple reason that our societies virtually *require* that one have such a state of consciousness to be able to maneuver successfully in them (i.e., such a consciousness has “survival value” in Western societies). Given this fact, it is difficult for Westerners to appreciate the religions in more “backward” parts of the world, and also difficult for us Westerners to gain an appreciation of the *true* nature of

Jesus's "ministry" and of the early Jesus movement. At least that's what Davies would argue, and I find his argument rather convincing.

As Davies argues (p. 10), the most common view of Jesus is that he was a *teacher*—a view that Davies finds unsurprising, given that most scholars who have written about Jesus are *also* teachers! Davies, however, raises the question of whether that's what Jesus was, *primarily*—as suggested by the very title of his book. He notes (p. 11), for example, that Paul of Tarsus (as evidenced by his various letters) did not perceive Jesus as a teacher—which fact is significant because Paul's letters are our earliest documents from that period that pertain to Jesus and early Christianity; and that this is also true regarding, e.g., the gospel of John and the writer of Acts (i.e., the same person who wrote the gospel of Luke).

Davies presents a rather different thesis about Jesus, and argues (p. 8) that his thesis is more in accord with the available evidence than any other thesis. This is a strong statement, to be sure, but one that Davies believes he has supported with the arguments offered in his book.

More to the point than the matter of a *complete* explanation of Jesus (ostensibly offered by Davies) is that I believe that the picture that Davies has developed of Jesus and early Christianity has more potential *relevance* for the present than does, e.g., contemporary Christianity. Granted that contemporary Christianity displays considerable variety—and in my 72 years of existence I have had exposure to a fair amount of that variety. However, I am aware of no contemporary version of Christianity that bears much resemblance to early Christianity, as pictured by Stevan L. Davies. (Which is, I suppose, a damning commentary on contemporary Christianity!)

I have, though, no interest here in *critiquing* contemporary Christianity. However, after I have described early Christianity, as conceived by Davies, the reader may wish to make his/her *own* critique. My interest, rather, is in summarizing some of the main points made by Davies in his book, and then indicating why I find Davies's picture relevant for today. My discussion here is organized into three sections, (a) Davies's view of Jesus, (b) his view of early Christianity, and (c) how, I believe, Davies's views have relevance for today.

I should note that in summarizing Davies, I hope that I have not distorted his ideas overly much; any short summary of a larger work is prone to distortion, whether intended or not, and my hope is that I have kept such distortion to a minimum. I need, however, to admit here that I "passover" what Davies says about healing and exorcism, and thereby of necessity distort his "message" somewhat: After all, the title of his book suggests that he perceives Jesus primarily as a *healer*! To repeat, however, my interest in Davies is limited by the fact that my primary interest in what he writes that has *relevance* for today. Another person might use the same basic approach that I am using here and find something *different* in the book of relevance, of course. If so, that person is hereby invited to write his/her *own* essay about Davies's relevance!

Davies's Picture of Jesus

Before commenting on Jesus, let me make some more general comments that relate to Davies's thesis regarding Jesus.

Introductory Comments

The reason that I referred to some of my personal background above is that it relates to Davies's thesis—that the Western concept of religion currently is not very representative of concepts that are common now in “backward” areas, and concepts that have been common through much of history. However, regarding history, Davies argues (p. 40) that the concepts that he is referring to only date back to the Agricultural Revolution—before which gatherer-hunter groups had still different concepts. (As an aside here, what Davies seems to suggest is that “possession”—the dominant given attention by Davies—is not associated with gatherer-hunter groups because they do not *need* it! I tend to agree!)

The basic concepts in Davies's thinking are—as the subtitle of his book suggests—“possession” and “trance.” What he is referring to are *altered states of consciousness* which today we would (probably, but not necessarily) understand in *scientific* terms, but in, e.g., Jesus's day were understood as involving *divinity*—i.e., possession by God, the Holy Spirit, the “[paraclete](#),” etc.

To be “spirit-possessed,” according to Davies (p. 23) means that while so possessed the “I” does not exist. Prior to possession one has a *primary persona*, but “adopts” (but not as a result of choice-making) a *new persona* while possessed. While possessed, one (p. 30) thinks differently and exhibits a different social behavior than while in one's primary persona; and possession *per se* tends (p. 32) to give one *authority* in the eyes of others, as well as *status*—which may help explain why (p. 39) *marginal* people are more likely to join groups within which possession is prized.

Davies notes (pp. 32, 33) that possession is common in countries such as India, parts of China, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil. He adds that (p. 25) *everyone* is genetically equipped for possession experiences, and that (p. 33) possessed people tend to have very similar *physiological* responses. Possession typically occurs (p. 35) in the presence of others—i.e., it is *social* in nature. When one is coming out of such an experience one tends (p. 35) to be in a state of pleasurable exhaustion. Interestingly, possession tends (p. 39) to be non-sexual in the sense that while in a possessed state, one's persona may be of the opposite sex—insofar as it *has* any sexual identification.

The Case of Jesus

I noted earlier that Paul of Tarsus, e.g., did not think of Jesus as a teacher; Davies notes (p. 44), in fact, that in the (canonical) gospels Jesus is referred to primarily as a *prophet*. He adds that in

Jesus's time there is evidence that spirit-possessed prophets were not unknown in Israel—so that Jesus was not unique in being a prophet of sorts at that time.

Davies believes (p. 53) that Jesus first experienced spirit-possession at his baptism (by John the Baptizer); and that the reference to a dove being present is believable given that (p. 61) visual hallucinations are often associated with possession. During that initial possession Jesus came to think of himself (p. 61) as the Son of God, but also as (p. 67) a physician—which Davies then uses as an excuse for launching into a discussion of Jesus's healings (Chapter 5, pp. 66 – 77) and Jesus's exorcisms (Chapter 7, pp. 90 – 104)—discussions that I ignore here.

Davies argues (p. 112) that most of Jesus's associates had been members of poorly-functioning families (see Davies for his reasoning here), and that his telling of parables, etc., had the purpose (but dimly realized on Jesus's part?) of *enabling* his associates to gain an altered state of consciousness (ASC)—which he referred to as the *kingdom of God*. This state of consciousness would (p. 117) help those experiencing it cope—the importance of that being that most of Jesus's associates came from poorly-functioning families. (I realize that Davies's argument here is rather novel, and therefore seems outlandish; if you are interested in the reasoning he uses, you are invited to read the book!)

Several of Davies's comments about parables are striking, one being that (p. 123) his parables were unprecedented—nothing comparable had existed before (e.g., in Hebrew history). Also, he notes (p. 126) that Bernard Brandon Scott has argued that “rule of God” is “not supposed to be understood”—and that he agrees with Scott on that point. He adds (p. 128): “Scott contends [that] Jesus'[s] parables were intended to produce a result, a [metanoia](#), rather than to communicate an ideology.” Put another way, Jesus used parables not as a *teaching* device but, rather, as a means to cause a “change of heart.” However, parable-telling *is* a teaching device of sorts in that (p. 131) the ASC that it may bring about gives one access to one's unconscious—and thereby increases one's capacity for learning and for thinking creatively.

Davies accuses (p. 147) Jesus of having a casual view of Torah, Jesus's view was, he says, “more in the manner of a Galilean peasant than that of a sophisticated liberal rabbinical theorist.. In short: keep the Sabbath but do not be fanatical about it; eat the foods that are set before you; do not worry much about details of purity restrictions, and so forth.” I agree that Jesus seemed to have a casual view of Torah *in terms of the illustrations that Davies offers* in support of his claim. However, *I* believe that Jesus took Torah *very seriously* in its basic message—that God's law for humans is that they love the neighbor (well-illustrated by the famous [Good Samaritan](#) parable).

It seems to me (contrary to Davies) that what *initiated* Jesus's ministry was his coming to sense a disconnect between the thrust of Torah and what was being promulgated by the religious leaders of his time: They were teaching a “blame the victim” version of the Law rather than a “love the

victim”—the true—version. That is, the religious leaders of his time were teaching an *inverted*—and thus *perverted*—version of the Law: That Jesus seemingly emphasized in his teaching that the central law is to love the neighbor (e.g., [Mark](#) 12:31) suggests that the religious leaders of Jesus’s time were not teaching this—a view confirmed by the entertaining story in [John 9](#) of the man born blind (see verses 1 and 2 in particular). Note that the view that I offer here of Jesus does not *contradict* that of Davies; it *supplements* it, rather.

Scholars have often commented on the fact that the Jesus of the synoptic gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke) seems to be an almost different person from the Jesus portrayed in John’s gospel. Davies’s explanation (p. 152) of this disparity is ingenious: Jesus was at times in his primary persona, at times in an ASC; the synoptics present the first version of Jesus, John’s gospel presents the “altered state” Jesus. That one *can* have two persona is supported by an abundance of anthropological research, Davies argues (p. 167).

Early Christianity

Scholars often argue that in the early years after Jesus’s death, *several* Jesus movements arose. For example, Burton L. Mack (*Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth*, 1995) has stated (p. 44): “For the first forty years we are able to identify at least seven different streams within the Jesus movement, though there may have been many more.” He then listed (pp. 44, 45) the following groups:

- A “family of Jesus” group.
- The congregations of the Christ.
- The Community of [Q](#).
- Those who produced the pre-Markan pronouncement stories.
- The True Disciples, who produced the [Gospel of Thomas](#).
- The Congregation of Israel (a group that “composed the pre-Markan sets of miracle stories”).
- The Jerusalem Pillars, “about whom we have only an early report from Paul in his letter to the [Galatians](#)”).

Mack then uses much of the rest of his book to discuss what is known (or hypothesized) about those groups.

Davies, however, insists (p. 171) that the first Christians formed a cult oriented to possession—admitting (p. 171): “When I consult scholarship on ‘the social world’ of formative Christianity, . . . I find no discussion of the role of spirit-possession at all.” (!) For Luke, Paul, and the writer of

John's gospel, Davies argues (p. 172), "receiving the spirit is the sine qua non requirement for membership in the Christian movement." And he offers [Acts](#) 8:14 – 17 as providing partial evidence for this position. On the day of [Pentecost](#), per [Acts](#) 2:

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Although some contemporary Christian groups place an emphasis on the "[speaking in tongues](#)" that allegedly occurred on that day, what Davies would emphasize about that day (the events of which he does not deny) is that those gathered experienced an ASC—an experience that had relevance *beyond* speaking in tongues.

Whereas *Jesus* induced an ASC in others via his *parable-telling* (Davies suggests), *Paul* did so (p. 178) through his *preaching*—which seemingly suggests that Paul had a [charismatic](#) personality (while in an ASC state, at least). This may explain why the early Christian movement—during which spirit possession was the norm, per Davies—was a *brief* one, lasting (p. 174) only one or two generations. For (p. 170): "A Christianity premised on the induced emergence of the religious trance state 'kingdom of God' would have inevitably declined in the absence of the talented inducer of that state." That is, Davies suggests that after the death of Paul of Tarsus, no one emerged as a "talented inducer"—the result being that Christianity changed drastically in character, and despite its current diversity, it currently has no components that closely resemble the earliest Christian movement. (!)

In an [earlier essay](#) I noted that I had sent an email to noted scholar Bart D. Ehrman regarding the matter of resurrection, and he had provided me with the following response:

Specifically, I think [that] the disciples were already Jewish apocalypticists who subscribed to the idea of 'resurrection' (unlike pagans); my guess is that soon after Jesus'[s] death (a week or two later?) one or more of his disciples had a vision (or dream interpreted as a vision?) of Jesus (much as my grandfather 'saw' my grandmother a couple of weeks after her funeral) and interpreted that as meaning that Jesus was still alive. And still alive, for a Jewish apocalypticist, meant raised from the dead. So the resurrection has started, and will be completed soon. Maybe next week.

Thus, for Ehrman Jesus's resurrection was an *imagined* event. What Davies (who, I believe, would agree with this) would add is (p. 183) that those who experienced an ASC tended to think of the change involved as being analogous to moving from a "dead" state (i.e., normal consciousness) to a "resurrected" one (i.e., an ASC state). For this reason, once someone had a vision of Jesus being alive again ("resurrected"), it may have been common in the early years to

perceive *one's own* (temporary) transformation as (p. 184) analogous to the supposed resurrection of Jesus. Later Christians, themselves beyond the stage when ASC experiences were the norm, mistakenly interpreted their forebears' emphasis on resurrection as referring to an *actual* historical event—and that notion has been with us ever since.

The Relevance of Davies's Views for Today

The statement in Davies's book which has most caught my attention is this one (p. 170): "In most of the world's cultures, a spirit-possession state, when expected, can be brought about fairly easily in a cultic setting." Davies makes clear that an altered state of consciousness is *desirable* for a variety of reasons—it enables (p. 131) one to gain access to unconscious potential within oneself for learning and creativity; when the members of a group [2] experience ASC simultaneously, they will tend (p. 185) to *think* of themselves as one body, and therefore be able to *act* as one body—and this is what I find of relevance for today, along with his claim that an ASC is easy to attain (under the right circumstances).

In my "[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#)" (2007, written under the name James B. Gray), after presenting my "take" on the Bible, I discuss (p. 38 ff.) the New Word Fellowship (NeWF), an institution which can be perceived variously—as a [substitute for church services](#) (or at least the sermon part of such services), as a means for conducting group therapy, [3] as a vehicle for developing plans, as a vehicle for "merely" socializing, etc.

Beginning on p. 49 of "Worship" I discuss expected outcomes resulting from NeWF participation, generic ones (p. 50 ff.) and genetic ones (p. 54, with a chart illustrating these on p. 55, and discussion of the chart on pp. 54 – 57). What I would add to that discussion now is that I would give primacy to the potential for achieving an ASC—because so much of a positive nature can flow from an ASC. Like Davies, I am convinced that achieving an ASC is relative easy.

Any reader of my earlier essays on this web site will know that (a) I am convinced that the threat of "global warming" is a real one, (b) it is now too late to halt continued "global warming" (or [TAD](#), as I called it in one essay!), and that (c) it is highly possible that "global warming" will cause the premature deaths of up to 90% of the world's population (!) within the next 50 years. In addition, I believe that (d) it would be foolish of us to look to government for leadership (given its control by, e.g., energy companies—which seem intent on continuing to produce polluting fuels), so that (e) our only sensible option is to *ourselves* start engaging in adaptive activities.

This can take the form of initiating self-sufficient homesteads, or joining with like-minded others to create small self-sufficient communities—the latter being the best option, in my opinion. The NeWF can play a role here, first, in that it can be used as a vehicle for planning such communities. Then, second, once a given community has been completed, the NeWF can be an

all-purpose institution—a religious one (if that’s desired), a planning vehicle, an institution for “simply” socializing, etc.

There is, of course, no reason to believe that engaging in adaptive activities will result in much of a reduction of the 90% figure. However, do we not, as humans, have a *responsibility* to “save” as many of our fellow humans beings as possible? The NeWF, I’m convinced, can play an important role in that “salvation” effort.

Endnotes

1. I recognize that the term “early Christianity” is potentially misleading. It seems likely that after Jesus’s death several groups formed, each of which looked to Jesus as “founder,” with only a few (if any!) using the term “[Christian](#)” to label itself. Indeed, if [Acts](#) 11:26, is to be believed, it was followers of Jesus in Antioch who first used that label for themselves. In [Acts](#) 9:2 the early followers are referred to as followers of [The Way](#). (Also see [Acts](#) 22:4 and [this](#).)
2. Early in the book (p. 35) Davies had stated that possession tends to be *social* in nature. That is, one is most likely to experience possession as a member of a *group*. I would add that members of the group must not be passive listeners to, e.g., a sermon (i.e., the typical church service) but, rather, must be an *interacting* group—i.e., one in which *discussion* occurs.
3. Recently I sent an email to [Mose Gingerich](#), leader of the ex-Amish in Columbia, Missouri, suggesting such a use for the NeWF with his “clients.” Mose was born and raised in an Amish community in Greenwood, Wisconsin.

[June 15, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/06/15/is-it-a-revolution-that-we-need/>]

Is it a *Revolution* That We Need?

Alton C. Thompson

Among the statements made by Bob Urie (an artist and political economist) in his [recent diatribe](#) against President Barack Obama (“O’Bomber” to some of us!) and his administration are the following:

[There have been] ongoing pleas from liberals, progressives and *New York Times* columnists that Mr. Obama stop compromising with Republicans on economic issues. Clearly from his actions, Mr. Obama isn’t compromising with Republicans—he *is* a Republican [emphasis added]. And Mr. Obama has demonstrated time and again that he isn’t a defender against the predations of our economic elite; he is an active *proponent* of them [emphasis added]. How much more evidence is needed for this to be clear?

And:

In addition to promoting the right-wing canard that family and national budgets are analogous, [1] Mr. Obama aided the editorial writers at the *Wall Street Journal* in their condemnations of our public and quasi-public institutions by shifting trillions of dollars of fraudulent mortgages and bank ‘assets’ from the (still) insolvent banks to the nationalized Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. By having the FHA (Federal Housing Administration) insure them, Mr. Obama’s dream team assured that these mortgages met the nominal requirements for purchase by these agencies. This affected the conversion of moderately corrupt institutions into everything that the right has ever accused public institutions of being—garbage dumps run by corrupt insiders for their personal benefit. Barack Obama converted what had been tribal fantasy in right-wing ghettos to fact.

Urie concludes his remarks by stating: “Sure[,] Mitt Romney would be a disaster. Barack Obama is *already* a disaster [emphasis added] What we need is a revolution, not more delusion that either candidate would serve our interests.”

Those who have kept up-to-date regarding the statements and actions of both Romney and O’Bomber will surely agree with Urie that “[n]either candidate would serve our interests.” But Urie’s claim that, therefore, “we need . . . a revolution” raises at least two questions:

- By “revolution” does he mean violent action to overthrow the government, or something else?
- If he *is* referring to a *violent* overthrow of the government, why does he not recognize that it *is* possible to accomplish change in a *peaceful* manner?—peaceful, at least, by

those striving to bring about change. [2] That is, does he not realize that there may be an alternative to violence that would accomplish the *same* objective—but accomplish it in a *better* manner, and even accomplish *more* than violence would?

I suspect—but have no way of knowing for sure—that Urie’s call for revolution has arisen not because he actually *wants* a revolution but, rather, because he has become so frustrated with politics as they have been manifesting themselves lately, that his call for revolution is simply an “off the cuff” remark that provides him with some *psychological* satisfaction—and helps in lowering his blood pressure!

I also suspect that Urie’s frustration has two components:

- Frustration with current politics.
- Frustration having its origin in a (subconscious) recognition that *he* is unable to identify a *meaningful* response to his frustration with current politics. Because of that frustration, he blurts out that we need a revolution, but does so only because he can’t think of a better answer, *not* because he is seriously proposing revolution.

I suspect, then, that on the one hand Urie is frustrated with the current *political situation*, but also frustrated with *himself*—the fact that he is unable to conjure up a solution to the political mess that he perceives that we are in currently.

Perhaps, then, his frustrations have led him to use the word “revolution” *carelessly*, when what he really *meant* to say was he would like to see *radical change*. A sort of change that is *usually*, perhaps, thought of as involving violence (one thinks, e.g., of the [Russian Revolution](#))—but *need* not.

Let’s assume that *that’s* what he meant, so that he would be open to ideas regarding how to bring about change in our society—change that would *not* involve violence.[2] What Urie seems to assuming *tacitly*, but needs to recognize *explicitly*, is that his current thinking is based—at this point unawares on his part—on a *false* assumption. That assumption is that tomorrow will be much like today—at least in the sense that the *nature* of our society will not be changing much over time.

It is easy to make such assumption, even if one has been a student of history; for although the study of history makes one aware of the fact that significant changes *have* occurred over just the past few centuries, most of us don’t live in history books!—we live on a day-to-day basis. It is understandable, then, why we find it hard even to *conceive* of drastic societal change within, say, a few decades.

But such change is not only *possible*, but *likely*. Consider the [following statement](#), for example, made by Kevin Anderson, a noted scientist who is an advisor to the British government on climate matters:

... I think it's extremely unlikely that we wouldn't have mass death at 4C. If you have got a population of nine billion by 2050 and you hit 4C, 5C or 6C, you might have [only] half a billion people surviving.

The author of the article—Steven Goddard—summarizes Anderson thusly:

Professor Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change, believes [that] **only around 10 per cent of the planet's population—around half a billion people – will survive** if global temperatures rise by 4C.

And Goddard then gives this quote from Anderson:

"We will not make *all* [emphasis added] human beings extinct[,] as a few people with the right sort of resources may put themselves in the right parts of the world and survive.

Some comments on the quotes above:

- The “we” used by Anderson in the second quotation implies that the warming (and related phenomena that have been occurring) are “[anthropogenic](#)”—meaning that they have been caused by human activities, in particular our burning of fossil fuels (especially since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, which began around 1750 CE). The burning of fossil fuels involves a transfer of carbon from below the earth's surface to the atmosphere, resulting in an intensification of the “greenhouse” effect that was already there—and that had been enabling human life (among other forms of life).
- We have known about the potential danger of “global warming” since the late 1800s, when [Svante Arrhenius](#) [1859 -1927] began to research the subject. However, the scientific work that has been done on this subject in the years since then has been paid little heed by governments and (especially) business leaders: One has only to have one's television on for a few minutes, it seems, before one is confronted with an advertisement from one of the energy suppliers, arguing that we *must* continue to drill for oil, dig coal, etc. What they forget to add is that doing so contributes to the problem of “global warming.” Because of our continuing use of fossil fuels, it's entirely possible that the 4C referred to by Anderson will occur by 2060 CE—and that the lives of the vast majority (90%?) of humans will be cut short.

- Anderson suggests that those who survive this disaster are most likely to be those who have relocated to “the right parts of the world”—those areas likely to be least affected by the ravages of “global warming.”

What I would add to this list—for the benefit of Mr. Urie—is that if *most* of the world’s population is culled by the various phenomena associated with “global warming” (e.g., not only excessive heat, but increased storminess, storms of increasing severity, flooding, drought, fires because of drought, etc.), it follows that most, if not all, of the world’s *societies* will collapse at some point in time. Thus, if our society disintegrates even though we had not *planned* on this occurring, and do not *invite* it, the probability is that *it will occur anyway*. But does this prospect *necessarily* need to be viewed in a solely negative light? Is it not at least *conceivable* that this “cloud” *may* have a silver lining—although “leaden” lining might be more accurate! Let me argue that possibility here, in fact.

Once one recognizes the very real possibility that our society will be collapsing within a matter of decades, current political issues—such as, Who is worse, O’Bomber or Romney?—will fade from one’s mind, and one will begin to ask: “What do *I* need to do to ‘save’ myself and my relatives, friends, and neighbors?” And once one begins thinking along *those* lines, it may occur to one that: “Here I have been assuming, tacitly, that my society wouldn’t be changing in my lifetime, but it now appears to me that it *will*—and in a *direction* that will be potentially disastrous for most of us. As I don’t want to die prematurely, and don’t want my family, neighbors, and friends to do so either, what can I—can we—do to save ourselves?”

I am hoping that Bob Urie will “wake up” to the threat that we face, and begin to develop ideas regarding how to respond. But if he doesn’t, let me offer this advice to him (but not only him, of course); you need to engage in *adaptive* planning and behavior, and that will involve:

- Determine where one will be least likely to be affected by the “global warming” that will be occurring—and move there.
- Develop, at that location, a self-sufficient way of life. After all, when our society begins the process of collapse, no food will be available in supermarkets, and unless you learn how to *produce* food for yourself (and family, etc.), you are likely to starve to death—or die of some dread disease.

In various previous essays on this site I have made additional comments on this matter, and therefore feel no need to repeat myself here. The basic point to keep in mind, however, is that one must not be so foolish as to look to government for “salvation.” There is a long tradition of “self-help” in this country, and if one is to have any hope for surviving the devastation that

“global warming” will likely be unleashing (a process that has already begun!), one must re-claim that tradition.

Endnotes

1. Ignorant people in general, I would add. The economy of a household has very little in common with the economy of a country—only the latter prints money, is just one example. The people who make this analogy demonstrate their utter ignorance of the academic discipline of Economics.
2. It’s entirely conceivable that those attempting to bring about peaceful change would be thwarted in their efforts—and violently so—by those who benefit from the Existing Order and therefore do not want to see it changed. What that possibility suggests is that those who work for societal change try to do so in an “under the radar” manner, so that their efforts go unnoticed by members of the elite—until the Movement for societal change has grown so large that the elite will not be able to squelch it, even after they become aware of it.

[June 16, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/06/16/learning-from-soylent-green/>]

Learning From *Soylent Green*

Alton C. Thompson

Being interested in “global warming” (better termed “Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization,” or [TAD](#)) and its implications, I decided to watch the movie [Soylent Green](#) last night (June 9,



2012) to see if I could learn anything of value from it. This movie was released nearly 40 years ago—in 1973—and stars Charlton Heston (Thorn), Edward G. Robinson (Sol Roth [1]), Chuck Connors (Fielding), Joseph Cotten (Simonson [2]), Brock Peters (Hatcher) and Leigh Taylor-Young (Shirl, the “furniture”!).[3] My report follows:

- The setting of the movie is New York City, the year 2022 (just *ten* years from now!).
- The situation in the movie is very different from that of the “present” (of 1973) in that most, but not all, live in misery. (Well, that’s not really much different from now, is it!) That misery is not depicted very well, however. When we see, e.g., that the stairs that Thorn is climbing contains “wall-to-wall” sleeping people, we can *infer* that their lives are miserable, but their misery is not *depicted* well.
- We learn early on that the reason for the situation that exists is the TAD that has been occurring.
- The movie gives the impression that TAD involves *only* an increase in average temperature—neglecting to make clear that *other* atmospheric phenomena of importance associated with TAD are (a) increased storminess, (b) an increase in the number of severe storms, and (c) increased variability in atmospheric conditions for a given location—so that the very concept of “climate” is becoming meaningless. Nor does the movie make reference to *secondary* phenomena *caused* by TAD which *themselves* have significance—such as insect infestations, drought (and resulting fires), and floods.

- The movie gives no impression that a massive die-off of people has occurred; people continue to live as they had before, but most, it appears, are now living in relative misery.
- The blandness of the food is emphasized. Because Thorn has a position of authority, he uses that authority at times—when in the homes of the rich—to steal some of the good food to be found in such homes, and Thorn and (especially) Sol then enjoy eating food that is delicious for a change.
- Regarding food, the focus is on food *scarcity* for most, with the government being forced to address that problem (to a degree, at least) by manufacturing food—“soylent green”—from those who have just died.[4]
- The movie provides no sense of a societal *transition* having occurred, there being just two time periods, “before” and “now,” with no sense of *how* the change occurred between “before” and “now.” Even the “before” part is limited to Sol’s references to the fact that “before,” food actually had some *taste*.
- Related to the absence of any description of a transition from “before” to “now” is the fact that the movie gives the impression that the “now” state will simply continue on indefinitely. The situation won’t get any better, of course, but neither will it get any worse.
- As I reflected on the movie, I realized how little impact it has had on our thinking and actions; it has been treated as mere entertainment, not as a warning as to how the world might actually be in, say, 2022. It occurred to me that that lack of impact might be due to the movie’s various deficiencies (as enumerated above), and I therefore sent an email to filmmaker Michael Moore, encouraging him to create a new—and better—version of *Soylent Green*. [5]

One thing that viewing the movie (again) did for me was to get me thinking about how, as TAD proceeds, societies—ours especially—will change. In my “[Lovelock’s Limitations](#)” I give this quote from James Lovelock’s *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning* (2009): “As we hold our meetings and talk of stewardship, Gaia moves step by step toward the hot state, one that will allow her to continue as the regulator, but where few of us will be alive to meet and talk.” I then added, in that essay, that although Lovelock predicted a horrendous die-off of the human population as the result (direct and indirect) of TAD, he provided no *scenario* of change. Of course, one would not expect a climate scientist to do this, because he would not be expected to have any expertise regarding how a society works, and how it might respond to TAD. But recognizing this *now* motivates me to ask two questions:

- [Steven Goddard](#), in writing about another noted climate scientist, has written: “Professor Kevin Anderson, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change [in England], believes [that] **only around 10 per cent of the planet’s population—around half a billion people—will survive** if global temperatures rise by 4C—a temperature that could be reached within 50 years!. My question: How did Prof. Anderson arrive at this survival rate of 10%? Is it possible that it could be much higher—or even so low that our species would become extinct? How *does* one arrive at a number such as “10%” in the absence of a hypothetical scenario of societal change? I have no idea!! Although the 10% figure is certainly *plausible*, under the circumstances it appears to be just a “wild guess.”
- Isn’t it possible that some societies would be able to cope better than others—not only because of their *location* (a point noted by both Lovelock and Anderson), but because of the *nature* of their societies? For example, does not Norway have an excellent chance to cope not only because of its northerly location, but because it is far more [egalitarian](#) than is the United States?

In realizing this deficiency, on Lovelock’s part, of failing to provide us with a plausible scenario of societal change, I then did so in that essay. However, I *now* admit that that scenario is rather simplistic, and this makes me wish that *someone* would provide a better, much more detailed, scenario. Those of us who believe that an increase in the number of survivors requires that individuals begin creating self-sufficient cooperative eco-communities would argue that an improved scenario of change would provide us with a better basis for deciding:

- *Where* to create such communities—not only in terms of favorable environment, but from a safety standpoint (i.e., being safe from desperate people looking for food).
- *Whether* those in the movement should actively publicize that movement or should, rather, proceed as stealthily as possible. The problem with seeking publicity is that when the effects of TAD begin to become severe, many will become desperate, and could put communities in the movement in jeopardy.

What that latter possibility suggests is that it may be wise for the movement to proceed with as little fanfare as possible. In suggesting such an approach, I realize that I am suggesting a sort of “[natural selection](#)” in which those who become a part of the movement have a much greater chance of surviving than “outsiders.” Such a suggestion may seem cruel—the height of immorality, in fact. But if human life has value, this course may be the only *responsible* one available.

The above remarks are based on the scenario that I had presented in the earlier paper cited, and I recognize that if a better scenario were available, my remarks might be somewhat different. For

example, one possibility is that rather than our governments collapsing, they would make our country a military dictatorship, thereby making us citizens slaves—actually, or in effect. If *that* occurs, the question that most of us will face will be: Is continued living even *worth* it? It seems to me that one of our mottos from years past was “[Live free, or die!](#)”

Endnotes

1. This was Robinson’s last film.
2. “Simonson” is a somewhat unusual name, but my mother’s mother’s name was Martha Simonson, who married Wilhelm (“Will”) Hasselquist.
3. The movie is based loosely on the novel [Make Room! Make Room!](#) by Harry Harrison, published in 1968. A new edition was published in 2008. A [remake](#) of Soylent Green has been rumored for some time, but has not yet occurred.
4. Ironically, the most beautiful part of the movie—for the movie *does* have some beauty!—is the death scene involving Edward G. Robinson. Beautiful scenes from nature are depicted, accompanied by the music of Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, and Greig. The irony here is that this was Robinson’s last film (he died on January 26, 1973).
5. In sending an email to Moore (to which I do not expect to receive a response) I mentioned the possibility of a new film mainly to pique his interest. As I state later in this essay, I have doubts that this would be wise, and in communicating with Moore (should that occur) would make my concerns known to him.

Some More-Or-Less Random Thoughts

Alton C. Thompson

We live in a time when so much of the “knowledge” that one has in one’s head comes, not from personal observation or talking to others who have made personal observations, but from watching television, listening to the radio, or reading newspapers or popular magazines (such as *Time*). What one sees/hears/reads includes “news” stories, advertisements, and any number of entertainment programs, each of which tends to convey a certain “message” to those in its audience. It’s not surprising, then, that much of one’s “knowledge” is partial, lacking in relevance even if “true,” or downright false.

One is bombarded with so much “information” (defined broadly) that it amounts to overload. That is, it presents one’s brain with processing difficulties, and one’s brain tends to respond to the overload by applying filters to reduce the *volume* of input, and also reduce the its *variety*. Our brains are so constructed that they demand a high degree of consistency, and when we encounter inconsistency, our brains tend to “choose” a particular view, and filter out everything that conflicts with that view.

The matter of *why* a particular person’s brain “selects” a particular view is likely an interesting and important question to pursue; likely such factors as one’s early upbringing and one’s life choices are among the factors that determine it—insofar as it *is* determined. However, my interest is not so much in *why* a person’s thinking develops in a certain way (a matter dealt with by, e.g., Thomas Frank in [*What’s the Matter With Kansas?*](#), 2004) as with the fact *that* it does. For the significance that I perceive in that fact is that although all of us Americans live in the same society, we often have difficulty *communicating* with others in our society because different people are on different “wavelengths,” and a person on one wavelength has difficulty communicating with someone on another wavelength.

In part, this multiplicity of wavelengths results from the large number of “information bits” with which we are bombarded in this society. But given that we all tend to be bombarded with basically the same set of “information bits” (for ours *is* a “mass culture”), differences in wavelengths exist not so much for that reason as the fact noted above—that because of the overload with which our brains are confronted, filtering becomes necessary as a means to maintain sanity, and different people filter differently (for whatever reasons), resulting in a variety of wavelengths.

So much of the commentary that occurs on the websites that I like to visit seemingly fails to recognize the above point, and as a consequence, the recommendations that I tend to encounter so often seem rather pointless: They seem to assume, if but tacitly, that everyone is on the same

wavelength, so that if others disagree with them, that's because—and *only* because—those others are *misinformed*. If those others can simply be supplied with correct information, that will get them on the same wavelength as oneself.

It seems to me that such a position is foolish, and that it would be wiser to (a) recognize that others *are* on different wavelengths than oneself, and (b) it is so *difficult* to communicate with those on a different wavelength, that it is foolish even to *try* to do so. What one should do, rather, is identify those who are on wavelengths enough similar to one's *own* to enable communication with them, and then restrict one's communication to such people.

Granted that one's co-workers, neighbors, even members of one's own family, may be on a different wavelength than oneself—and one cannot *avoid* interacting with them.[1] Thus, one is forced to accommodate oneself to such people, and rather than talking to them about topics that really matter to oneself, one must seek a common ground—such as talking about sports. That is, one must find topics that either will not involve controversy, or will involve differences of opinion, but those differences are such that people tend not to have much psychological investment in their views. There is always the possibility that one will be able to convert some others with which one interacts to one's own way of thinking (i.e., one's own wavelength). But doing so takes skill and patience—qualities that most of us lack, so that for most of us, trying to convert others to our way of thinking will prove fruitless.

An important question that arises here is: “Given that I recognize that many wavelengths exist in my society, and that I am primarily interested in communicating with those others who are on a wavelength relatively similar to mine, how do I *identify* such people?” One's *reasons* for so doing might be simply socialization—which today does not require face-to-face contact—or sharing ideas or developing plans, etc. But *whatever* the reasons, the question of *how* to identify like-minded others is the fundamental question.

Fortunately, in this age of the internet, Facebook, dating sites, etc., the problem of locating like-minded others is not a serious problem. Especially if one's interests are of an *intellectual* nature in that one would like to make contact with others who broadly share one's ideas, one can write for one or more of the fairly numerous sites (such as this one) devoted to the expression of opinions, hoping to receive feedback; and when one encounters articles on one of these sites, and can identify the email addresses of their authors, this enables one to communicate with those authors—something which I do fairly frequently.

“Theoretically,” the existence of modern communications technology enables one not only to identify like-minded others, and then initiate contact with them, it also opens the opportunity for like-minded others to engage in joint activities. However, such activities are most readily engaged in by like-minded people who *live* near one another, so that they can actually meet face-to-face, and engage in discussion, planning, and finally joint action. Still, it can be comforting to

know that others share one's views, and are acting on their views—even if one does not know those others personally, and has never had physical contact with them.

A knowledge of the fact that people are on different wavelengths can, of course, also be used for nefarious purposes. For example, a political party can hire pollsters to probe the minds of citizens to determine (a) what wavelengths exist “out there,” and (b) how many are in each wavelength category. Such information can then be used by party leaders to couch messages in a manner that will appeal to a majority of the citizenry, thereby increasing the likelihood that the party's candidates will be elected (or re-elected). On the other hand, a failure to do the above can spell disaster for a party.

For example, exit polls taken during the recent recall effort of Gov. Scott Walker in Wisconsin revealed that about [60% of the voters](#) didn't believe that Walker's actions, as governor, were such as to *justify* a recall effort. Evidently the leadership of the Democratic Party in the state had never bothered to identify this as a potential problem for them, and as a consequence made no effort to *combat* this belief prior to the election itself. Given that Walker's campaign was able to spend about eight times as much for their candidate (most of that money coming from out of state) as was the Thomas Barrett campaign for their candidate, that factor likely played a role in the election's outcome. But the ineptness of the Democratic party also was likely a contributing factor.

Andy Kroll, in a [recent article](#) on Wisconsin's recall election had this to say:

The energy of the Wisconsin uprising was never electoral. The movement's mistake: letting itself be channeled solely into traditional politics, into the usual box of uninspired candidates and the usual line-up of debates, primaries, and general elections. The uprising was too broad and diverse to fit electoral politics comfortably. You can't play a symphony with a single instrument. Nor can you funnel the energy and outrage of a popular movement into a single race, behind a single well-worn candidate, at a time when [all the money in the world from corporate “individuals”](#) and [right-wing](#) billionaires is [pouring](#) into races like the Walker recall.

Colin Millard, an organizer at the International Brotherhood of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers, admitted as much on the eve of the recall. We were standing inside his storefront office in the small town of Horicon, Wisconsin [located about 55 miles NW of Milwaukee]. It was night outside. "The moment you start a recall," he told me, "you're playing their game by their rules."

He continues:

The takeaway from Walker's decisive win on Tuesday is not that Wisconsin's new populist movement is dead. It's that such a movement does not fit comfortably into the

present political/electoral system, stuffed as it is with corporate money, overflowing with bizarre ads and media horse-race-manship. Its members' beliefs are too diverse to be confined comfortably in what American electoral politics has become. It simply couldn't be squeezed into a system that stifles and, in some cases, silences the kinds of voices and energies it possessed.

His “solution”:

In the wake of the recall losses, the people of Wisconsin's uprising must ask themselves: Where can they make an impact outside of politics?

However, is what's needed “making an *impact*”? Such a solution seemingly rests on the tacit assumptions that (a) our society will continue “rolling on,” (b) will continue in its march toward an ever higher degree of inequality, but, nonetheless, (c) is “fixable.” What's necessary to occur is for “progressives” to realize that it is foolish for them to try to make an impact in politics, so that if they are to have an “impact” on the society, they need to determine *how* they can make an impact outside of politics, and then *act* on the ideas that they have generated.

I *may* be misreading Kroll in attributing to him the above assumptions, but tend to think otherwise. For me, recognizing that our political system is broken is *necessary*, but not *sufficient*. What one needs to recognize more *basically* is that the very continued existence of our species is in danger; because of this, the need is not simply to “fix” our society, but to adopt a different perspective entirely. I guess that the wavelength that I'm on is different from the one Kroll is on, and therefore there may be no hope for him becoming converted to *my* wavelength.

What that means is that I will make no effort to try to convert him, and will continue to write essays that discuss “[trendular atmospheric depatternization](#)” (TAD)—also known as “global warming”—and encourage the reader to perceive this problem as I do. As, that is, a problem that *individuals* need to address—acting either as individuals or as part of a small group of like-minded individuals (creating, e.g., cooperative eco-communities for themselves). Looking to politicians/politics for leadership would be an utterly wrongheaded approach, I am convinced.

Although no movement of this sort currently exists (so far as I know), I see tremendous potential for one arising, for two reasons. First, there are already many “[intentional communities](#)” in this country, laying the groundwork for such a movement. Second, the Occupy movement—which started right here in Wisconsin—demonstrates that many people in our society are dissatisfied with the society's direction, and could be attracted to a communitarian movement should such a movement get started.[2] The only thing that's needed is for someone to arise as a dynamic leader of the movement. May that occur—and *soon* (although *yesterday* would have been even better!).

Endnotes

1. Although one may be tempted to view this fact negatively, one should not; for it can be helpful—for one’s *own* intellectual development—to become aware of other viewpoints, for doing so can help one be more flexible in one’s thinking, more willing to change one’s views as one learns of new facts and ideas.

2. To a degree, I agree with Richard D. Wolff, who [stated recently](#): “The lesson that American history teaches is thus *not* the need for just *any* alliances or cooperation between unions and the community. We have had them in various forms for many decades, and while some gains were made, those alliances could not prevent unions and the left from declining steadily and severely. The key lesson is this: What makes all the difference is a very *particular* alliance, one between unions and an explicitly anti-capitalist social and political movement.” The real question for me, however, is ***what is it that’s necessary to do***, and given that Wolff makes no reference to TAD, his perspective on this matter differs rather substantially from mine. Besides, I find it hard—no, impossible!—to imagine that the sort of alliance that Wolff advocates will ever develop in this country. And even if such an alliance *does* develop, it is unlikely to center its attention on TAD—on, that is, the most important issue that we humans face at present.

[June 20, 2012: <http://bravenewworld.in/2012/06/20/its-later-than-you-think/>]

It's Later Than You Think

Alton C. Thompson

I have taken my title from the old (1949) song “[Enjoy Yourself \(It's Later Than You Think\)](#)”, but in doing so do not intend to convey the message, “*It's later than you think, and so just go ahead and enjoy yourself, becoming oblivious to whatever might happen in the future.*” Rather, my message here is that *because* “it's later than you think,” we need to give serious consideration—and ASAP—to what's happening, and also start giving serious thought to the question of how we will *respond* to what is occurring.

What *is* occurring? Here are two examples:

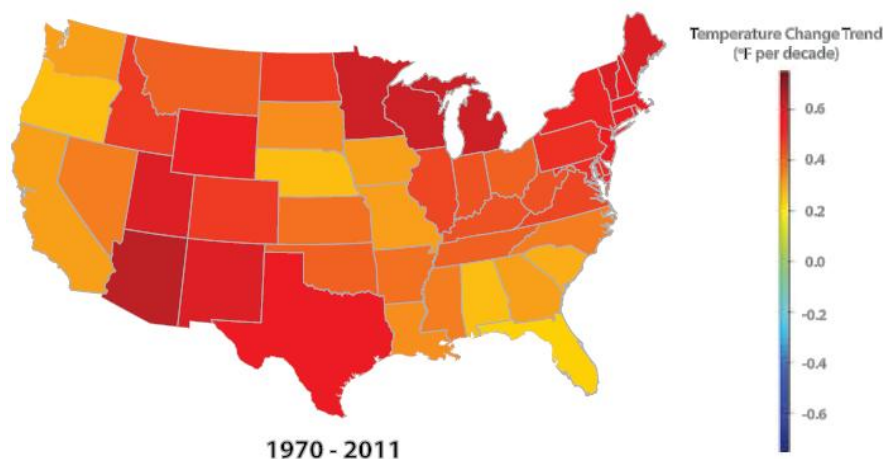
The [Climate Central](#) organization—which publishes both popular and scientific works concerned with climate change—just published (June 12, 2012) a report entitled [The Heat is On: Temperature Trends in the United States on Rise](#). Some of the conclusions presented in this report are that:

Over the past 100 years, the top 10 states warmed 60 times faster than the bottom 10 (0.26°F per decade vs. 0.004°F per decade), when looking at average mean temperatures. During this timeframe, 45 states showed warming trends, although 21 were not statistically significant. Three states experienced a slight cooling trend.

Since 1970, warming began accelerating everywhere. The speed of warming across the lower 48 more than tripled, from 0.127°F per decade over the 100-year period, to 0.435°F per decade since 1970, while the gap between the fast and slowly warming states narrowed significantly; the 10 fastest warming states heated up just twice as fast, not 60 times as fast as the 10 slowest warming states (0.60°F vs. 0.30°F per decade). Over the past 42 years 17 states warmed more than half a degree F per decade.

The states that have warmed the most—whether you look at the past 100 years or just the past 40—include northern-tier states from Minnesota to Maine and the Southwest, particularly Arizona and New Mexico. Places that have warmed the least include Southeast states, like Florida, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina, along with parts of the central Midwest, like Iowa and Nebraska.

Thus, despite what skeptics argue, the *factual* data that have been gathered demonstrate the important point that “since 1970, warming began accelerating everywhere” within the 48 contiguous states of the United States. The following map depicting changes appears on p. 1 of the report. What the map indicates is that although there has been some variation from state to



state in the *degree* of increase since 1970, *all* of the contiguous states of the U. S. have experienced an increase in average temperature. And as the text states, “Since 1970, warming began accelerating everywhere.” Although this study was limited to the United States, a similar study done of other countries

would likely produce broadly similar results—with countries varying, though, both in the *amount* of change as well as *variability* in amount within the country.

Although this report provides us with “bad news,” it is not the *only* report to do so. A report issued slightly over a week ago (on June 4, 2012) by <http://insideclimatenews.org>, written by Katherine Bagley, and entitled “[Climate Scientists Lament a Nation Stuck on the Wrong Debate](#),” presents a number of highly relevant facts about (a) *what* is occurring, so far as “climate change” is concerned, (b) *how* the realities of change deviate from model predictions, (c) *why* those models are rather “conservative”—and therefore inaccurate—in their predictions, and (d) why “climate scientists” have not been more vocal in combating the misinformation regarding “climate change” that has been receiving so much publicity in our society. Among the important points made in this report are the following:

- From an international standpoint, the principal agency charged with studying and reporting on “climate change” is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of the United Nations, whose most recent major report was issued in 2007. That report presents a series of scenarios of climate change, each based on a particular set of assumptions. An assumption common to these scenarios, however, is that the promises that the various countries have made regarding the cutting of carbon emissions will actually be kept. In fact, however, many countries have *not* done so—making the model predictions of the IPCC too low. For example, the middle-of-the-road “estimate that the world would emit between 27 and 28 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2010” turned out to be in error, for “In reality, 30.6 billion tons of CO₂ were released that year, the latest figures available . . .” Thus, one reason why IPCC scenarios have been *under-*predicting is that one of the assumptions used by those scenarios has lacked in realism.
- The IPCC scenarios haven’t even made an attempt to predict sea-level rise as a result of the rapid melting that has been occurring of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets. Thus, although scientists—such as paleoclimatologist Lonnie Thompson, of Ohio State University, “who has led studies of glaciers and ice sheets in 16 countries”—know that

these ice sheets have been melting, and that sea level will be rising in consequence, the IPCC “left them out because of uncertainty about how to predict effects of ice-sheet meltdowns in climate models.” (I assume that this omission also means that as ice melts, and bare land is exposed, given that the [albedo](#) of land is less than ice—because of color differences—the heating of that land means that heat energy re-radiated from it will further contribute to “global warming,” but that that “contribution” is not accounted for in the models.)

- The IPCC models are deficient in their assumptions regarding the physics of cloud formation, but the IPCC has made this deficiency a research priority.
- One reason for the deficiency of the IPCC models is that some of the inputs that should go into the models are not well-enough understood yet. This includes (a) long-term changes in solar activity and their effects, (b) the effect of aerosols on global temperature, (c) the effects of the presence of sulfates in the atmosphere (which are known to block sunlight), and (d) the effects of the presence of black carbon in the atmosphere (which absorbs heat from the sun, and can thereby accelerate warming).
- Lonnie Thompson is quoted as saying: “It takes seven years to produce an IPCC report. By the time it is published, the science is already dated . . . and the models being used aren’t accurately assessing how rapidly these changes are taking place.” Because of the time lag involved between when research occurs and when the results are published, “projections will [invariably] be on the conservative side, Thompson says.”
- John Reilly, co-director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change, “says [that] most scientists studying climate change today are viewing ‘the seemingly unstoppable rise in greenhouse emissions’ with ‘increasing alarm.’” However, the question arises: “Why, then, aren’t more climate scientists speaking out about climate change?” Daniel Sarewitz, co-director of the Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes at Arizona State University provides this answer: “Researchers find it hard to raise significant questions even within the climate science community for fear that it will be exploited by the skeptics.” That is, the “atmosphere” (no pun intended) in our society is such that most climate scientists in this country ([James Hansen](#) of NASA being an exception) live in fear of attacks by right-wing “deniers.” (Given this, those of us who are *not* climate scientists have a responsibility, do we not, of *publicizing* the research findings of climate scientists? Or if not publicizing those results, *accepting* them and then ourselves *acting* on them.)
- The models that exist so far, despite their deficiencies, are better able to predict temperature changes for the entire earth than for individual regions of the earth.

Daniel Sarewitz may have been speaking for most climate scientists when he stated that “it is unfortunate that the national debate is lagging so far behind.” If that’s the case, what it illustrates is that when scientists step outside their area of expertise, they may make foolish statements. In the case of Sarewitz’s statement, there’s the tacit assumption that because governments have the

legal responsibility to address a society's problems, it is governments that *must* be looked to for leadership in addressing the problem(s) that he has discovered.

What this (tacitly-held) assumption fails to recognize is that most societies—and certainly this includes *our* society!—are dominated by elites, and that in today's world, energy companies wield a tremendous amount of power: They use the airwaves to convince the public that, e.g., because we have enough coal to last for several centuries, it only makes sense to use it; and are able to get their way for that reason (i.e., by convincing a gullible public), and because they are able to “buy” politicians, who will then do their bidding.

Given elite control of our government, it is simply foolish to look to government to “lead us out of the wilderness”: Government officials are followers, not leaders, and our *true* leaders have such a fixation on short-term profits that they are incapable (seemingly) of understanding that if (*when* is perhaps more apt!) the ship sinks, they will be in the same boat as everyone else. (The [*Titanic*](#) struck an iceberg in 1912, 1514 of its 2223 passengers lost their lives.) As I noted in my [*“Lovelock's Limitations,”*](#) “[James] Lovelock uses [in his [*The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning*](#) (2009)] a striking analogy to make his point (p. 85) [regarding the insidious nature of “global warming”]: “Like the skier who accidentally starts an avalanche [which may take his life!], there is little [that] we can do to stop its [i.e., global warming's] destructive course.”

If it is foolish to look to government for “salvation,” then it follows logically (does it not?) that if one is have any hope for salvation from the ravages inflicted by “global warming,” one must “take matters into one's own hands.” What this should especially mean (in my opinion) is that one should join with others and plan/build a self-sufficient community at a location that is “safe”—both from the phenomena associated with “global warming,” and desperate people who begin wandering around looking for food once the society has started to collapse (which *is* likely to occur, by the way).

Climate scientists may say that they would like our citizens to be better-informed about the results of their science, but the relevant question here is: “What will they then *do* with that information?” If they use it to inform their legislators, hoping thereby that those people will act on that information, they will thereby demonstrate ignorance of how our society “works.” If, however, they use that information to then develop an action plan for themselves, and then act on that plan, they will demonstrate wisdom. However, members of the general public are likely to take the second course only if they are made *aware* of that alternative. Even then, they may not take that second course. Thus, for those of us who believe that the only path to salvation—insofar as it *can* be achieved—is the second alternative, we are forced to wrestle with the question: “Shall I do what I can to publicize the movement for change, and strive to bring people into it or, rather, would it be wisest to proceed stealthily (the latter because of the threat posed to those in the movement by desperate people who are *not* a part of the movement)?

Our Reckless Leaders

Alton C. Thompson

It is difficult today to muster any degree of enthusiasm for being a citizen of the United States, one reason being the recklessness that seems to prevail with our leadership—especially in government and the business sectors. This recklessness has been, and continues to be, manifested in a number of ways, but I will limit my attention here to just a few of them. I would give *first* place, of course, to the unwillingness of our leaders—especially in the business sector, its energy subsector in particular—to recognize the threat posed by “global warming;” but as I have discussed that topic in numerous previous essays on this site, I will say nothing about that threat here.

Although “global warming” is beginning to have important effects—*negative* ones, I might add—*now*, it will have its most severe effects in the future—but the *near* future (perhaps 30 – 50 years from now). Another potential problem for the future, however—and again one that reflects the recklessness of our (political) leaders—is the cuts in education that have been occurring. For example, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in a [report](#) dated April 18, 2012, stated, e.g., that:

The state’s annual school staff report shows that school districts cut 2,312 positions for the 2011-12 school year, a 50 percent increase in staff losses from the previous school year.

Statewide, 311 of 424 school districts, or 73 percent of districts, reported cutting teachers this year.

Overall, public schools in Wisconsin are employing 1,446 fewer teachers this year than they did in the 2010-11 school year. This represents a 2.4 percent loss in full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff at a time when student enrollment is stable.

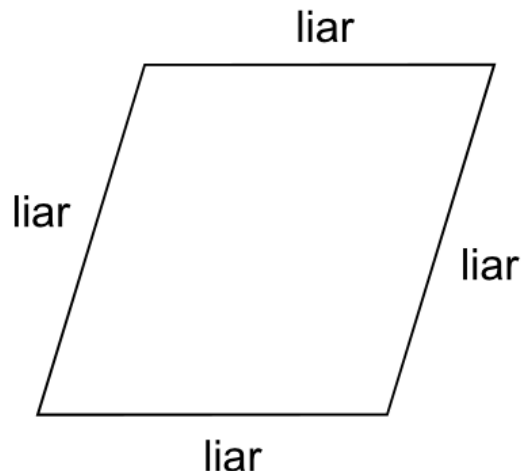
The 2011-13 state budget made historically high cuts to education funding. General school aids were cut by \$749 million and the per pupil revenue limit was reduced by \$1.6 billion from prior law.

If enrollments are *falling* in a state, there would be justification for making cuts in the teaching and administrative staffs in that state—for there likely is some ratio of students to teachers-administrators that will ensure that students will receive good educations, and that this will be done in an efficient manner, from a cost standpoint. However, in the case of Wisconsin—led by Governor Scott Walker (son of a Baptist minister!), who recently survived a recall election—

local leaders have been forced to make cuts in teacher staffs because of budget cuts at the state level.

This is not a unique occurrence in Wisconsin; and if Willard “Mitt” Rhombney (I don’t spell so good!) becomes president, this funding problem is likely to deteriorate further—in part because

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF "MITT" RHOMBNEY



some of his recent [comments](#) demonstrate an unbelievably high degree of ignorance regarding school funding. (The current mayor of Minneapolis, Minnesota, [R. T. Rybak](#), stated on a television program tonight (June 13, 2012), that he had talked to several Massachusetts

school officials recently, and was informed by them that when Rhombney was governor of that state, he revealed himself as “clueless” regarding educational matters.)

(Here is a link to a site that provides overwhelming evidence—multi-volume, in fact—in support of the above “liar” claim :<http://maddowblog.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/06/08/12126612-chronicling-mitts-mendacity-vol-xxi?lite>.)

If one considers this denigration of education by our leaders from a conventional standpoint (with which I am not comfortable!), one must regard such talk and behavior as reckless. For given that technical skills are becoming ever more important in the workplace (e.g., the engineering firm that I work for currently is dominated, from a numbers standpoint, by software engineers), if the youth in our country do not receive a proper education, not only will they suffer for it, but the economy of our country.

Our country’s educational ranking is already low, and can be expected to become even lower given the recklessness of our leaders. And beyond the matter of technical competence, and its implications for employment, there is the matter of having a solid liberal arts education that enables one to be a good citizen (by which I don’t mean just a person who *votes* on a regular basis). Of course, if the intent of our leaders is to solidify elite dominance, why should they be expected to care about education in this country?

A third way in which our leaders demonstrate their recklessness is in our relationships with other countries—“less advanced” ones in particular. Those relationships seem to be dominated by the “holy trinity” embedded in the “IKE” principle (with no slur of President Dwight D. (“Ike”) Eisenhower intended here):

- Interfere in the affairs of other countries, this including the intimidation of their leaders.
- Kill their citizens—their guilt or innocence being of no relevance. Our latest procedure for doing so is the use of drone strikes, with which President Barack O’Bomber seems to have a love affair.
- Exploit their citizens, doing so to serve the interests of U. S. corporations, using the backing of the U. S. military. (See, e.g., Gen. Smedley Butler’s 1935 [*War is a Racket*](#)).

Such actions not only are in violation of about any *moral* code that exists (the “mob’s” code being an exception!), but are reckless in that they invite “[blowback](#).” (For extended discussions of the latter see William Blum’s [*Killing Hope*](#) and the many books that the late [Chalmers Johnson](#) [1931 – 2010] has written on the subject.)

Glenn Greenwald, in an [article yesterday](#) (June 12, 2012), “What Might Cause Another 9/11?,” discussed this matter, and said, for example:

I realize that screaming “9/11” has been the trite tactic of choice for those seeking to justify the U.S. Government’s militarism over the last decade, but invoking that event strongly militates against the policies it’s invoked to justify, precisely because those policies are the principal cause of such attacks, for obvious reasons.

In fact, one need not “imagine” anything. One can simply look at the explanations given by virtually every captured individual accused of attempting serious Terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. The Times Square bomber, the Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad, **said this**:

As soon as he was taken into custody May 3 at John F. Kennedy International Airport, onboard a flight to Dubai, the Pakistani-born Shahzad told agents that he was **motivated by opposition to U.S. policy in the Muslim world**, officials said.

Common sense tells one that if you treat others badly, they may choose to retaliate. The principle that one should “[do unto others](#) . . .” rule is usually associated with the world’s religions, but is better perceived as a simple statement of common sense. Evidently, however, our leaders are not only reckless, but lack common sense.

Fourth, let me pick on just one of our leaders, Addison “Mitch” (“no, I’m not wearing a mask”) [McConnell](#), the senior Senator from the state of Kentucky, and the Minority Leader in the U. S.



Senate. He has stated more than once that his principal objective, as leader of the Rethuglicans (like I said, I ain’t so good at spelling!) in the U. S. Senate, is to prevent President O’Bomber from having a second term. As a consequence, he has been an obstructionist, and has motivated Rethuglicans in the U. S. House of Representatives (where they are in the majority, unlike the Senate) to do likewise. A politician is supposed to represent the interests not only of his/her specific constituents, but have the country’s interests in mind as well. Mr. McConnell disgraces the position that he holds by his childish, irresponsible—and utterly reckless—behavior. For in not even *trying* to serve the interests of our country, he helps to

not only threaten our country’s *economy*, but the *safety* of this country’s citizens.

This lack of a spirit of cooperation and compromise in Congress currently has so disgusted scholars Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein that they just published [It’s Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism](#). What’s surprising about this book is that the latter author is associated with the right-wing “think tank” the [American Enterprise Institute](#), from which one would expect ideologically-tinged books and reports. Evidently, however, Ornstein is “his own man,” and is not beholden to any ideology—and I admire him for that fact.

Related to the impasse, or near impasse, that has existed in Congress is, fifth, the ignorance displayed by our politicians regarding Economics. This ignorance may not qualify as “recklessness” (for “recklessness” implies *willful* behavior), but needs to be mentioned anyway. Robert Reich has made this [comment](#) about the slowness of our recovery, and in the process expressed the viewpoint of mainstream Economics:

Here is [Robert Reich’s](#) explanation of why recovery is so slow:

The major reason this recovery has been so anemic is not Europe’s debt crisis. It’s not Japan’s tsumami. It’s not Wall Street’s continuing excesses. It’s not, as right-wing economists tell us, because taxes are too high on corporations and the rich, and safety nets are too generous to the needy. It’s not even, as some liberals contend, because the Obama administration hasn’t spent enough on a temporary Keynesian stimulus.

The answer is in front of our faces. It’s because American consumers, whose spending is 70 percent of economic activity, don’t have the dough to buy enough to boost the economy – and they can no longer borrow like they could before the crash of 2008.

The “70 percent” figure that Reich quotes may be a bit high (it *is* a matter of controversy—one [writer has argued](#) that 40% would be a more accurate figure), but whether the correct number is 40, 70, or something in between, the point is that consumer spending is now a highly important component of our society—compared, e.g., to 1790, when our society was basically agricultural, and much “[production for use](#)” occurred. What this fact of our now being a consumer society means is that if consumers lack money to spend (because, e.g., of being unemployed) their non-spending will be felt in other parts of the economy, causing unemployment in other sectors.

Rethuglicans like to argue that it’s the rich who are the “job creators” in our society, so that they must not be taxed at a high rate: In not being taxed at a high rate, they will have more money to invest in productive activities, will do so, and there will be a “trickle-down” effect.

Unfortunately, that “theory”—“wild guess” is a more apt term!—is utterly lacking in empirical support, it being more accurate to say that it is consumer spending that creates jobs.

Rethuglicans, however, seem to have such an irrational attachment to the notion that it’s the rich are the job creators that they simply can’t be convinced otherwise.

Our business leaders have also, finally, been guilty of reckless behavior recently, inflicting immense damage on the economy, and the society in general. After this country’s Great Depression, the government passed (1933) the [Glass-Steagall Act](#) in an effort to regulate business to the degree that an economic collapse would not occur again. The “theory” behind such regulation is that business leaders will tend to act on the basis of just the interests of their *own* selves/firms, and in doing so will not necessarily serve the *nation*’s interests. Thus, the purpose of regulations is to prevent business people from engaging in actions that might damage the public’s interests.

The recession of 2008 – 2009 can be attributed to a variety of factors. Jacob Weisberg has, though, [summarized](#) the thinking of some on this matter thusly:

The [pithiest explanation](#) I’ve seen comes from *New York Times* columnist and Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman, who noted in one interview: “Regulation didn’t keep up with the system.” In this view, the emergence of an unsupervised market in more and more exotic derivatives—credit-default swaps (CDSs), collateralized debt obligations (CDOs), CDSs *on* CDOs (the esoteric instruments that wrecked AIG)—allowed heedless financial institutions to put the whole financial system at risk. Financial innovation + inadequate regulation = recipe for disaster is also the favored explanation of Greenspan’s successor, Ben Bernanke, who downplays low interest rates as a cause (perhaps because he supported them at the time) and [attributes the crisis to regulatory failure](#).

(For another discussion of that recession see [this](#). For discussions of the economic history of the United States see [this](#). For a discussion of Iceland’s experience, which in many respects has been the opposite of ours, by Cenk Uygur, see [this](#).)

When I think of the leadership in this country, the words that come to my mind are “ignorant,” “greedy,” “reckless,” and “evil”—terms that do not give one a “[warm and fuzzy feeling](#).” Given this, wouldn’t the sane person *welcome* societal system collapse?—especially were there the prospect of a New Society emerging to take its place. What’s needed, then, it seems to me, is for such a Society to emerge; the only thing that’s lacking at present is someone to come forward and recognize that this is a propitious time to begin building a New Society, and to then start the process of creating it.

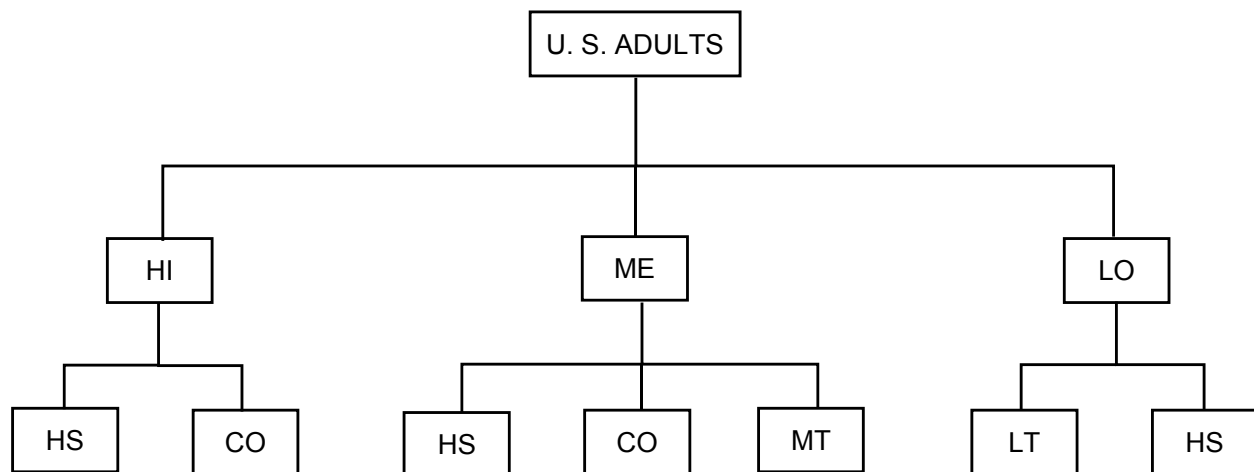
Three Uses for “Profiles”

Alton C. Thompson

“Profile” is most commonly used at present in conjunction with a *practice*, that of “[profiling](#),” which can be thought of as “[extrapolation](#) of information about something, based on known qualities.” The most common form of “profiling”—or so it is claimed (usually correctly!) by those *subjected* to profiling—that is occurring currently in our society is [racial profiling](#), “the use of an individual’s [race](#) or [ethnicity](#) by law enforcement personnel as a key factor in deciding whether to engage in enforcement (e.g. make a traffic stop or arrest).”

My use of “profile” in this essay, however, has but a tangential relationship with the *common* meaning of “profile.” “Profile,” as used in this essay has a *graphic* meaning in either literal or abstract terms, and the point that I wish to make here is that this sort of profile can have (at least) *three* types of use, with only one of them, however, of *specific* relevance from the perspective of my “view of the world.”

To clarify my meaning here, I must begin with a few words about *categories* and *classifications*, and will do so by referring to the following figure:



A *category* is a *single* kind of thing (with “thing” here defined broadly); a *classification* is a *set* of categories—not a random set but, rather, a *connected* set. Thus, in the above figure, each of the boxes is a *category* (which, note, are all *connected*), and the entire set here constitutes a *classification*.

The classification depicted above has three levels, the “highest” level being “adults living in the United States.” The second level consists of income categories, high (HI), middle (ME), and low (LO). Level three consists of four categories, LT (less than a high school education), HS (a high

school education only), CO (a college education only), and MT (more than a college education). What the above classification “says” is that all high-income adults either have a high school or college education; the middle-income adults all have at least a high school education (with some having college degrees, and some even post-graduate degrees); and some of the low-income adults did not complete high school, but others did (but none has a college-or-higher degree).

The above classification is merely a hypothetical one, of course, used here simply to clarify the meanings of “category” and “classification.” Likely, however, this classification does have some real-world relevance—in that, e.g., those with low incomes tend to have little in the way of education also.

One of the important questions that one can ask of classifications is how are they *created*? And the answer to that question is that there are two basic approaches to use in creating a classification, *logical division* and *grouping*. Other names for these types are, respectively, “classification from above” and “classification from below.”

In creating a “logical division” type of classification, one begins with a certain category, then, on the basis of a certain [variable](#), identifies a series of subcategories. *How* one would identify those categories would depend, in part, on the particular [measurement scale](#) used. *That* would be determined by the nature of the variable in question—although one typically has some choice in which of two or more scales to use. We usually think of “measurement” as involving *quantification*—i.e., the *degree* to which something has a certain trait (such as temperature or height). But the *nominal* scale (where one simply identifies *kinds* of characteristics—such as the colors red, green, blue, etc.) is also regarded as a measurement scale; and the *ordinal* scale (used for ranking—e.g., in beauty contests) uses numbers in a *non-quantitative* way. (For clarification, if one person is 7 feet tall, and another one is 5 feet tall, one can say that the second person is 5/7 (or 71%) the height of the first person. However, in a beauty contest, it is not meaningful to say that the person in 4th place is 25% as beautiful as the person in 1st place. I should probably add that ranking is typically used in cases where assessments are *subjective*—and necessarily so)

In the classification example above (which is a logical division), for income I have tacitly used dollars (\$) as the unit of measurement, and have arbitrarily drawn boundaries (not identified) between “high” and “medium,” and between “medium” and “low.” At the third level (education) I have basically used pre-existing categories (e.g., “graduated from high school, but not from college”). Although this logical division has only three levels, with any logical division further division can occur, if desired

Before introducing the second type of classification—grouping, or classification from below—I need to make clear that one type of classification (e.g., the grouping) type is not *inherently* superior to the other. Each type has its legitimate uses, and if one is aware of the fact that there *are* two different approaches to classification, one will be in a better position to decide which

type to use in any given situation, given one's objectives. In part, which type one uses will depend on the variables that one wants to include in one's classification. Also, however, one's choice will depend on the *time* and *resources* available to one, for the logical division type of classification can be created without the collection of any data; rather, it can be created "off the top of one's head."

A grouping type of classification, in contrast, *does* require the gathering of data (unless one is able to use data already gathered by someone else). Therefore, the creation of that sort of classification usually requires that one has the time to gather the necessary data, and the financial resources that enables one so to do. In addition, the creation of a grouping type of classification requires that one have the knowledge that will enable one to gather *meaningful* data. For the [GIGO](#) principle applies here: If your grouping classification is based on garbage data, your results likely will be garbage.

Let's assume, however, that we wish to develop a grouping classification of people on the basis of *beliefs* and *values*, and that we have administered a "questionnaire" to a sample of people, which asks them to express their degree of agreement with each statement using a 7-point [Likert](#) scale—with -3 meaning "strongly disagree," -1 meaning "disagree slightly," +2 meaning "agree somewhat," etc. Assume further that all of the "questionnaires" have been completed, with responses given to all of the questions. We can then record the data we have gathered in a *data matrix* like this one:

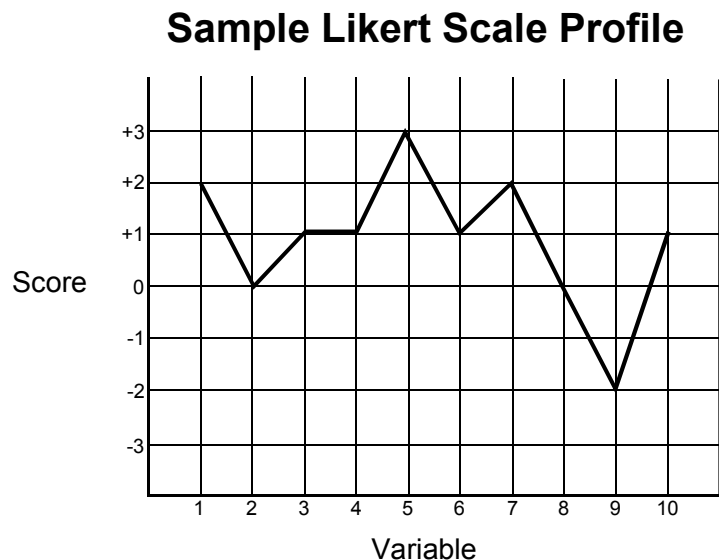
	V_1	V_2			V_j		V_p
O_1	v_{11}	v_{12}			v_{1j}		v_{1p}
O_2	v_{21}	v_{22}			v_{2j}		v_{2p}
O_i	v_{i1}	v_{i2}			v_{ij}		v_{ip}
O_n	v_{n1}	v_{n2}			v_{nj}		v_{np}

O_1 represents a particular person who had completed one of the "questionnaires," with O_n being the n^{th} person in our sample. V_1 represents the first "question" on the "questionnaire," and the cell immediately below it (v_{11} —the "v" here stands for "numerical value") would record the first person's response to that first question, taking the form of a (whole) number—including 0—between -3 and +3.

Likewise for all of the other people in the sample, and all of the other variables included. We assume, then, that each cell contains one, and only one, number, a number between -3 and +3.

Let us assume (for the sake of simplicity) that the "questionnaire" used had only 10 questions, so that $V_p = 10$. Next, we can think of taking the values in

a given row (i.e., the answers provided by a given person), and representing those answers graphically, such as is depicted below:



This is a graphic representation of the answers given by one of the people in the sample assumed here to the 10 “questions” on the “questionnaire.” The value of displaying the numbers *graphically* is that this enables one, in a glance, to “picture” the nature of the beliefs/values of the given person.

Note here that the hypothetical person “behind” this profile gave the same “answer” for both questions 3 and 4.

What this *might* suggest to the researcher is that the two questions

might be asking essentially the same question. Given this possibility, what the researcher probably should have done was to run a [correlation analysis](#) of the variables (i.e., a “V-analysis”) as his/her first step after obtaining his/her data. If one finds, as a result of such an analysis, that a pair (or more) of variables are strongly correlated, this suggests that they are measuring the same phenomenon—so that one of the variables in the pair could be deleted before proceeding.

The “proceeding” to which I am referring here is a *statistical* comparison of (in effect) the various “profiles” embedded in one’s data matrix—what might be called an “O-analysis.” (Note that a V-analysis involves the comparison (using a computer) of data matrix *columns*, an O-analysis the comparison of data matrix *rows*.) Various computer programs exist for this purpose, but what they have in common is that they group rows (people, in this case) on the basis of *similarity* (which is a different concept than “correlation”)—i.e., the similarity of *profiles*. [1] A given program will not “produce” a *single* set of categories (within each of which there is a high degree of similarity) but, rather, any number of sets—although the nature of the data plays a big role in how things “fall out.” That is, *conceivably*, a given program could produce one clear set of categories; but people being variable, this would not be expected. In fact, if the program used *did* produce one clear set of categories, one would likely suspect that the data one had used was not particularly meaningful.

A given category produced this way would be *multivariate* in nature. That is, the similarities possessed by the (in this case) people in the category would be in terms of a *number* of variables. This means that on some variables all (or virtually all) might have given +3 as their answer, on another variable +2, on still another 0, etc.

Why might one be interested in creating a grouping classification? Motives can vary, of course. For example, a *scholar* might be interested in explaining voting behavior—just for the sake of *understanding* such behavior—and might hypothesize that people with a certain “profile” tend to vote a certain way. By creating a grouping classification, and then relating voting behavior to the categories thereby identified, the researcher can check his/her hypothesis, and engage in a process of changing his/her variables and the phrasing of his/her “questions” until a good “fit” is obtained between the categories identified and voting behavior. (If a good “fit” is found, the results of the study can be used for making future predictions, e.g.)

A *business firm* might be interested in determining categories of people on this basis for the purpose of developing a *market strategy* for each category—giving most attention to those categories with the most potential customers in them. Likewise, other organizations that want to “target” people, creating different messages for different segments of the population, might also want to begin by identifying groups in the population, using the procedures outlined above.

The distinction of interest to *me*, however, regarding profiles, is that between *actual* profiles and *desired* ones. My interest is not so much in the *actual* profiles “out there” as in what I would regard as a *desirable* one—on the basis on initiating a New Society movement. As I have commented on this matter in a number of earlier essays, I will limit my attention in *this* essay to what I would label as an “ideal” profile for inclusion in a New Society movement. One would have an ideal profile if, in participating in providing responses to a “questionnaire,” the person would give a +2 or +3 answer to each of the following statements:

- I perceive “global warming” as an extremely serious threat to our species.
- I am strongly dissatisfied currently with the society I live in.
- I try to perceive others *accurately* (rather than through “rose-colored glasses,” e.g.), but also as my *equal*: I perceive myself as neither inferior, nor superior, to others.
- I believe that well-being comes from, e.g., the quality of one’s interaction with others rather than from the consumption of goods and services. (Put another way, I believe that for people to have well-being, they must have a way that accords with their “design specifications” as humans; see, e.g., Chapters 3 and 4 in my eBook, [*What Are Churches For?*](#))
- I find it easy to be empathetic relative to others.
- I find it easy to be cooperative in my relationships with others.
- I like adventure.

- I am open-minded, always willing to consider new evidence—after separating the wheat from the chaff—and changing my views accordingly.
- I am not a “driven” person; rather, I tend to be somewhat “laid back.” That does not mean, however, that I do not have strong views on those things that I believe are highly important: I may be *passionate*, but I’m not *driven*.
- I tend *not* to look to government for solutions to our problems. Rather, I believe that we need to become aware of what problems we face, determine how best to address those problems, and then do so—acting either as individuals, or as individuals joined with like-minded others.

Whereas those interested in *classifying* people (using a grouping procedure) need to first gather data and then proceed to the manipulation and analysis of that data, given that *my* interest in “profiling” has a different basis, the steps involved with developing, and then using, a grouping classification have no relevance for me. Rather, I *begin*, in a sense, with a profile (rather than derive profiles through a research process), with my task then being to *identify* those with that profile.

But *how* to do this? My answer is simple: Write essays that express my views, hoping that some who share my beliefs and values will read them, and that a movement will then somehow get started by those who share a certain set of beliefs and values. What this suggests, of course, is that a movement that got started would contain a *certain* type of person to the exclusion of *other* types—i.e., a certain type of “natural selection” would be involved. Whether that would be a “good” or a “bad” thing is a question that might occupy (no pun intended) some of the professional moralists in our midst, I suppose. My view of the matter, however, is that it selection (in terms of self-selection) *simply can’t be avoided*—so that, in consequence, there would be no point in invoking the question of morality in commenting on it.

Endnote

1. Presumably matchmaking firms use a procedure that “matches” somewhat what I have just described. That is, they solicit people to contact them, those people are then sent some sort of questionnaire (one that requires quantitative responses), those receiving the questionnaires then “answer” the questions, and return them to the firm. The firm then compares “profiles,” and informs pairs whose profiles are “highly” similar. I am, of course, guessing about this, never having used such a service (being married for over 46 years!).

[I did not send this to Sufyan: too short.]

Foolish Statements From David Suzuki

Alton C. Thompson

Canadian environmentalist David [Suzuki](#) recently [said](#) (“Suzuki: ‘Absurd’ to Let Corporations Profit in Name of ‘Saving Planet’”):

We need big solutions [to our environmental problems] and the big solutions have got to be [from] government. The challenge is well beyond what we do in our individual lives.”

My reaction: What a pathetic comment!:

- It’s true that the “challenge is well beyond what we do in our individual lives.” But in making that statement you are tacitly assuming that the challenge *can* be met in a way that little loss of life will be involved.
- In assuming, tacitly, that the challenge *can* be met, you assume not only that government has the *ability* to face this challenge, but that the government is *likely* to act on that challenge.

I would assert, rather, that the challenge we face is not only *beyond* government’s ability to address in a manner likely to save most lives, but that even if it *did* have such an ability, it’s not likely that it would *use* it to do so.

I will be brief here:

- Climate scientists such as Kevin Anderson (an advisor to the British government on climate matters) believe that it’s highly possible that “global warming” will wipe out as much as 90% of the world’s population within the next 50 years. It’s possible that this figure can be reduced somewhat, but that will occur only if individuals “take matters into their own hands” and act appropriately. I would interpret this to mean: Create small cooperative eco-communities in areas that are likely to be safe from the ravages of “global warming,” as well as from desperate people, once our society starts to collapse
- Perhaps the Canadian government is not controlled by elite interests (including energy producers) to the extent that *our* government is, but governments in general tend to be under elite control. That fact is not, in itself, a problem; the problem, rather, is that members of the elite are extremely short-sighted, and display no interest in the future and what it might hold—including for themselves! Strange—but true!!

Is There *Any* Cause for Optimism?

Alton C. Thompson

Consider the following facts:

- The burning of fossil fuels—which involves the transfer from carbon that had been safely locked away under the earth’s surface to the atmosphere—results in an *increase* in the carbon dioxide (CO₂) content of the atmosphere.
- As that gas remains in the atmosphere for more than a century,, the continual burning of fossil fuels results in an *accumulation* of the gas in the atmosphere—i.e., a constantly increasing *level* of the gas in the atmosphere. And if that input occurs at an *accelerating* rate (as it has been doing), so does the level of the gas’s *presence* in the atmosphere.
- An increase in the level of that gas’s presence in the atmosphere results in an increase in the amount of *heat energy* being “trapped” in the lower atmosphere (i.e., the “greenhouse effect” is intensified over time).
- That extra heat energy heats the air, water bodies (the oceans and other water bodies), and results in an increased melting of ice and snow. It also results in an increase in the number of storms, an increase in the number of severe storms, and in increased variability in atmospheric conditions at any given location.
- As more and more ice and snow are melted, more bare land is exposed to the sun’s rays; given that bare land has a lower [albedo](#) than does ice or snow, it is heated by the sun’s rays, and then emits long-wave heat energy—which *further* heats the atmosphere.
- As a warmer atmosphere causes permafrost to thaw in the far north (e.g., Canada, Russia’s Siberia), methane gas is released—a gas far more potent than carbon dioxide for “trapping” heat, thereby *further* heating the atmosphere.

What I have been describing is a process that “feeds upon itself.” That is, as heating occurs, its *effects* become further *causes*. In a sense, the process that occurs here is much like a snowball that is thrown downhill from the top of a hill, that in striking farther down the hill begins to roll downward, and as it does so adds more and more snow, so that by the time it reaches the bottom of the hill, it is much larger in size than it was originally. That is, there is a “snowball effect” associated with our continual pumping of new carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Atmospheric heating will proceed in much the same way: If “greenhouse gases” such as carbon dioxide are *artificially* added to the atmosphere (which *is* what’s involved with the burning of fossil fuels), a point will be reached where earth’s ability to absorb the excess is reached, and further additions then begin to *accumulate* in the atmosphere. In doing so, they begin to have *effects*, which effects *themselves* then become *causes*

We humans have, perhaps for centuries, but especially since about 1750 CE, been operating as if we are not a *part* of Earth System. But we *are*, whether we are willing to admit that fact or not. And in consequence, at some point we will be *unable* to deny this fact, because *the results* of our past denial will be too obvious to ignore. When we *do* wake up, however, it will be too late to reverse the process that we began about 260 years ago. Our only choice (if one can call it that!) *then* will be to let the process run its course.

It may already be too late to reverse the process; and if it’s *not* too late yet, given that we’re still (most of us, at any rate) *asleep*, it’s virtually certain that we *will* pass the point of no return soon. Is it any wonder, then, that climate scientists such as [Kevin Anderson](#) predict a massive culling of the world’s population within this century—perhaps even within the next 50 years?

Given the above-listed facts about Earth System, why do most ignore them? Do most believe that there is some sort of magic that can be invoked that will negate the laws of physics? If *that’s* the case, is there not reason to declare that our species is the *stupidest* of the intelligent species—a species whose stupidity is so extreme that it (a) *might* lead to the demise of our species, (b) has *already* resulted in the loss of numerous species, and (c) will most *certainly* result in the loss of still more species.

If all species owe their *origin* to God, then we humans have been most *ungodly* in the recklessness that we have demonstrated, especially since about 1750 CE. And, ironically, it has been “Christians” who have been the *most* ungodly—*by far*! There are many vocal “deniers” in our midst—most of whom are likely “Christians”—who seem to believe that the laws of physics can be repealed; however, they tend to couch their denial in language that makes no reference to the laws of physics, which fact then lends their views some degree of plausibility—to the gullible, at any rate.

To answer the question posed by my title: No; there is *no reason whatsoever* for optimism! Those who see “the handwriting on the wall” in terms of where we’re headed may recognize that they *do* have some opportunity to save themselves—if, that is, they move to “safe” locations, and build for themselves (in a communitarian situation, I would suggest) a self-sufficient way of life (in anticipation of societal collapse occurring within a matter of decades). But even if some *are* able to survive this way (there are no guarantees!), they are likely to face constant challenges;

some *may* be able to meet those challenges (in part because they are “lucky”), and do so continually, but many will *not* be able to, and will die in consequence.

This is not a pretty picture to paint regarding the future—more on the order of [*The Scream*](#) (by Edvard Munch) than [*Mona Lisa*](#) (Leonardo DaVinci). But, given that my heritage is Norwegian (as was Munch’s), I guess that its’ not surprising that I would paint a *Scream*-like picture.



A Flood Equivalent?

Alton C. Thompson

One of the most interesting facets of world history is that [flood stories](#) have been widespread.

[They have been] [widespread among many cultures](#), though perhaps the most well known examples in modern times are the [biblical](#) and [Quranic](#) account of [Noah's Ark](#), the foundational myths of the [Quiché](#) and [Mayas](#), through [Deucalion](#) in [Greek mythology](#), the story of [Utnapishtim](#) in the [Epic of Gilgamesh](#) and the [Hindu puranic](#) story of [Manu](#). Parallels are often drawn between the flood waters of these myths and the primeval waters found in some [creation myths](#) since the flood waters are seen to cleanse humanity in preparation for rebirth. Most flood myths also contain a [culture hero](#) who strives to ensure this rebirth.

Those of us in the West are, of course most familiar with the flood story involving [Noah](#). These various stories—including the one involving Noah—may have some basis in fact: In, i.e., *actual* flooding that occurred; in observing seashells on land, and *inferring* that the land was once under water; etc. None of them, however, describes *historical* fact. Many people, though, fail to recognize the *symbolic/religious* intent of these stories, and foolishly engage in a search for, e.g., Noah's ark. As P. T. [Barnum](#) is reputed to have said, "There's a sucker born every minute." (Evidently there was a time when Barnum was trying to get those who had attended one of his first shows to leave, so that he could begin his second show, and hit on the idea of putting up a sign saying "This way to the egress." Those seeing the sign, evidently thinking it was referring to an exotic bird or animal on display (rather than "exit"), obeyed the sign—enabling Barnum to begin his second show!)

A question that arises today, however, is whether the story of, say, Noah still has relevance, and I would argue that it *is* instructive to compare the story of Noah with our current situation—one in which we are faced with the threat of "global warming"—or what I like to call "trendular atmospheric depatternization," or [TAD](#)). Let me, then, compare the two:

1. *What is/was involved:*

- [Flood](#): An accumulation of *water*.
- [TAD](#): An accumulation of *heat*.

2. What is/was involved, more *specifically*:

- Flood: Rain over a period of 40 days and 40 nights ([Genesis](#) 7:4), along with “springs of the great deep” (*Genesis* 7:11), which accumulated so that it covered the entire world, including all of the high mountains (*Genesis* 7:19).
- TAD: An increase in the “greenhouse gas” content of the atmosphere, causing a “trapping” of heat energy, and thereby an accumulation of heat energy.

3. The *when* of occurrence:

- Flood: In the distant past.
- TAD: It is occurring *now*, but will become more and more noticeable over the next few decades.

4. The *where* of occurrence:

- Flood: The entire earth was affected.
- TAD: The entire earth is now being affected, and will be more so over time.

5. Historicity:

- Flood: *Mythical*. Flood stories, such as that involving Noah, may very well have some *basis* in fact, but are not themselves of a factual nature.
- TAD: Although there are “deniers” in our midst, virtually all climate scientists—i.e., the experts on the subject—believe that TAD is now occurring, and will intensify in occurrence as the years pass. Different regions will likely experience change *differently*, but the *trend* for the world as a whole will be one that is *upward*.

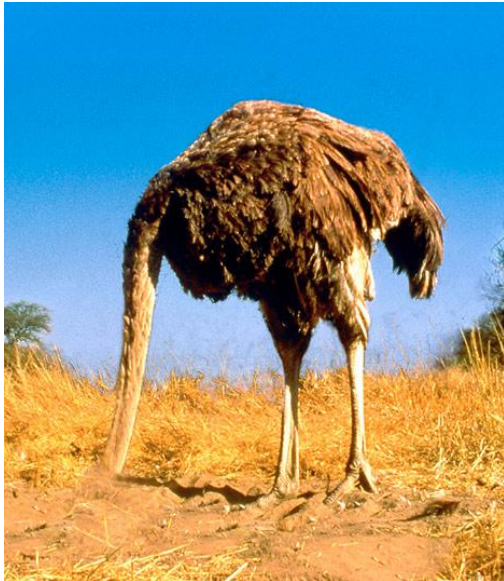
6. What were/are the *results*:

- Flood: All living things were destroyed, with the exception of the occupants of the ark that Noah built.
- TAD: Some species have already become extinct, and more are likely to become so. Climate scientists such as [Kevin Anderson](#) expect that a severe culling of the *human* population will occur, because they believe that we are either at, or near, the point of no return regarding TAD—i.e., the point where nothing can be done to halt the continued “progress” of TAD. Whether the reduction of the world’s population will be 70%, 80%, 90%—or even 100% (meaning extinction for our species)—cannot be known with any degree of certainty, of course. In part, that percent depends on how many come to realize

the *nature* of the threat that we face; recognize that if they are to have any chance to survive, they will need to engage in *adaptive* activities that they themselves have planned; and then *act* on those plans—not waiting for government to provide leadership. Even then, those who do so are not guaranteed survival.

7. :Who was/is responsible:

- Flood: God, who chose to destroy the creatures that He had created.
- TAD: Humans, although the actions engaged in by humans—i.e., their use of fossil fuels—that *caused* the problem had an *intent* other than that of self-destruction. Humans discovered uses for coal, and then later, petroleum, and those uses seemed to contribute to their “standard of living.” In the late 1800s Swedish scientist [Svante Arrhenius](#) [1859 – 1927], however, speculated that an increase in “greenhouse” gases in the atmosphere would increase the *temperature* of the atmosphere, and the later CO₂ recordings by [Charles Keeling](#) [1928 – 2005] at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii provided confirmation to Arrhenius’s speculations. Despite the research by climate scientists since the time of Arrhenius, however, much of the general public—including many of our political and business leaders—prefer to ignore those research findings, seemingly believing that if they ignore that research, it will simply go away. One might refer to this as the “ostrich with head in sand phenomenon,” although this would be an insult to ostriches!



8. Who *survived/will survive*:

- Flood: Per *Genesis* 7:13, Noah, his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, along with their wives, and every kind of animal and bird, both “clean” and “unclean” survived the flood—all because they were aboard the ark that Noah had built.
- TAD: Those most *likely* to survive will be those who anticipate the ravages of TAD, and who act accordingly. But doing so will not *guarantee* survival, and it’s entirely possible that some of

the survivors—assuming, that is, that there will *be* survivors—will be people who had made no plans!

9. *Why* did it occur:

- Flood: Per [Genesis](#) 6:5, the LORD saw how great the wickedness of humans had become, that the thoughts of humans were always evil; the earth (*Genesis* 6:11) was

corrupt, full of violence—so that the solution to this problem was—of course!—a sort of violence on *God's* part (!), drowning the various creatures that He had created.

- **TAD:** Assuming that our interest here is in identifying the *ultimate*, rather than *proximate*, cause of TAD, I would identify *The Discrepancy* as that ultimate cause (see Chapter 2 of my [eBook](#)). The idea here is that prior to the Agricultural Revolution (which occurred about 10,000 years ago) humans had a way of life that accorded—“meshed”—with their biology. With the Agricultural Revolution, however, humans began developing new ways of life, but their biology remained basically as it *had* been—meaning that a Discrepancy started to develop between the way of life for which humans had become “*designed*” and the way of life they actually *had*—that Discrepancy becoming especially notable after about 1750 (i.e., the beginning of the Industrial Revolution).

The development of this Discrepancy has had various implications, an important one being a *mental* one. Prior to the Agricultural Revolution one not only *lived* in one's surround, but one's *mind* tended to be *absorbed* in that surround during one's awake time (and perhaps even while asleep)—meaning that most of one's thinking was of an [idiographic](#) nature. That is, one's thinking tended to be *particularistic*, recognizing *individual* things, but also doing some limited generalizing based on inferences from one's observations. With the Agricultural Revolution, however, one's thinking became increasingly less tied to one's surround, and became increasingly abstract and nomothetic (i.e., oriented to the *general* rather than the *specific*).

Philip Slater (an intellectual for whom I have a great deal of admiration) has *implicitly* (but not *explicitly*) recognized that a “[Fall](#)” occurred with humans, his emphasis being on the rise of *individuality* (see his [Earthwalk](#), 1974). Interestingly, Slater argued (p. 18) that: “Individuality began with kings because they were the first to be set apart and seduced into the fantasy of autarchy.” He added: “This need to extend oneself in a linear way in the environment is called narcissism and is no longer the exclusive province of kings.” It is, in fact, the *prevailing* mentality.

Associated with the rise of individuality was the rise to dominance of what Slater termed (p. 26) “disconnecter virtues,” and Slater includes the following on his list of such “virtues”: courage, perseverance, rectitude, chastity, ambition, honor, dutifulness, self-discipline, temperance, purity, self-reliance, impartiality, incorruptibility, dependability, consciousness, sobriety, asceticism, and spirituality—all of which Slater labeled as “ecologically unsound”!

Slater associated a *control* mentality with these “virtues, and argued that (p. 90) a “deep inner emptiness . . . [is common with] Americans, who so often seem incapable of

finding joy in living, but must fill up their days with frantic striving after mastery—either inner or outer.” And regarding the latter, Slater made the startling comment that technological development has its basis in pathology! He stated, for example, that (p. 34): “Technological growth will sag drastically when the motivational pathology that drives it dries up.” *If*, that is, it ever dries up!

Slater seemed to express a degree of optimism for the future in stating (p. 170) that it is virtually impossible—if the raw materials are at hand—to *avoid* creating what is needed to balance a system, so great is the internal pressure for that creation to emerge.” On the other hand, however, in his reference to the possibility of people living in simple communities, he stated (p. 27): “People raised in an industrial society are unfitted for life under such conditions and would be miserable if they tried.”

This is a sobering claim—one that provides no support whatsoever to my proposal, stated in many of my previous essays on this site—that if some are to avoid the onslaught of TAD, they will need to establish cooperative eco-communities for themselves. Slater’s point here is well taken; I believe, however, that the level of dissatisfaction in this society is so high *currently* (as compared to when Slater published his book) that at least *some* of the dissatisfied—perhaps the more adventurous ones in particular—would find a New Society movement an attractive option—*were* one to develop, that is.

10. What was/is its *purpose/function*:

- **Flood:** Per [Genesis](#) 6:11 God caused the flood because, with the exception of Noah and his family, everyone was evil. Evidently God saw no hope in these people becoming “converted” (!), so that the only solution that he could think of was to kill them! That done, and with the flood waters receded, a New Beginning could occur with Noah and his family.
- **TAD:** At the beginning of this essay the quotation that I gave included this statement: “flood waters are seen [in many of the old flood stories] to cleanse humanity in preparation for rebirth.” Note, first, how this concept of “cleansing” is associated with the baptizing associated with [John the Baptizer](#): One’s immersion in water serves to (symbolically) wash one’s sins away, with the immersion also simulating drowning—a killing of one’s “old self.” In emerging from the water, however, one is declared a “new creature” who has been “born again,” and is then expected to resolve to thenceforth live a better life (one in accord with the love of neighbor command, presumably).

Will, second, TAD *itself* serve as a cleansing agent of sorts? That is, will the world’s “riffraff” be killed by TAD, with those having (what Slater has termed “humble virtues,” p. 26) being the survivors? Such “virtues” as cowardice, distractibility, sensuality,

inability to complete tasks or resist temptations, partiality, dependency, inconsistency, corruptibility, etc.

I guess that the best answer is: Time will tell. I suspect that selectivity *will* be involved with TAD survival, with those surviving having much in common. However, as societal disintegration proceeds, the initial homogeneity of the Movement may very well give way to more variety—which could actually be *helpful* to the Movement, as greater variety implies (among other things) more variety in the *skills* that people would be bringing to the Movement.

There are, then, parallels between the mythical past represented in the flood stories, such as that involving Noah, and the present and foreseeable future. Those of a “fundamentalist” persuasion might, of course, want to quote this from [Genesis](#) 9:

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

They might use this quotation to argue that life will *never* be destroyed “again,” because God *promised* not to do so—and gave us the rainbow in the sky to *remind* us of that promise. But if any fundamentalist *does* this, it can be simply pointed out to her/him that the reference here is to destruction by *flooding*, with no reference whatsoever to *TAD*. Of course, fundamentalists tend to have a pre-scientific mentality, thus are unlikely to heed such an argument. Which suggests that fundamentalists may be the *least* likely to survive TAD! As [Upton Sinclair](#) once said, “Harry said, ‘It’s too bad, but of course we couldn’t attempt to smuggle him. The old man has made his bed and he must lie in it.’”

